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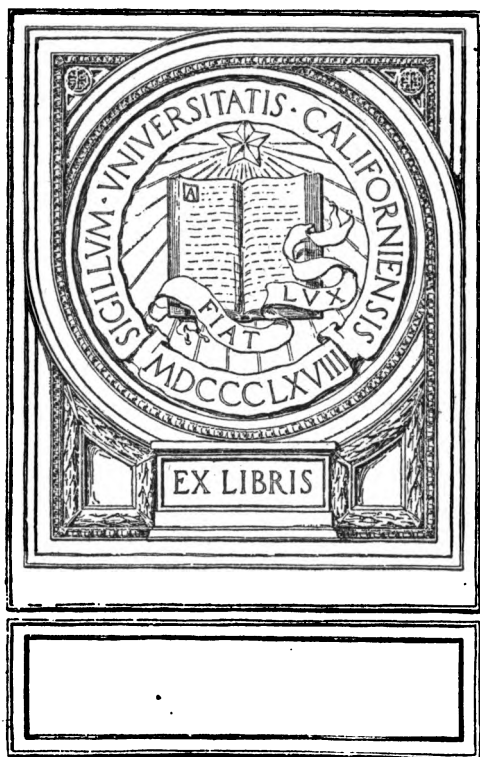
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INQUIRY
INTO THE
CAUSES AND REMEDIES
OF THE
LATE AND PRESENT SCARCITY
AND
High Price of Provisions,
IN A
LETTER

TO
THE RIGHT HON. EARL SPENCER,

FIRST LORD OF THE ADMIRALTY, &c. &c.

Dated 8th November, 1800,

WITH
OBSERVATIONS

ON THE
DISTRESSES OF AGRICULTURE AND COMMERCE

Which have prevailed for the last Three Years.

BY SIR GILBERT BLANE, BART. F.R.S.

PHYSICIAN TO THE PRINCE REGENT.

SECOND EDITION;

With considerable Alterations and Additions.

PRINTED EXCLUSIVELY IN THE PAMPHLETEER.

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This Tract was first published without the Author's name, in the end of the year 1800, in which as well as in the preceding year a great scarcity prevailed in consequence of bad crops. As the soundest and most received principles of political economy are here inculcated, and as the Author has annexed some notes and illustrations applicable to late events, and which may be useful in the present distressful crisis, we have deemed it deserving of a place in our collection of works which ought not to perish, and we have prevailed on the Author to make the corrections and additions which the reader will find.

INQUIRY, &c.

MY LORD,

I HAVE for a great part of my life been in the habit of studying political economy as a recreation, in those hours which I could spare from the proper duties of my station. Though these duties have but little relation to this subject, they have been such as to enable me to converse with and derive information from persons eminent in rank and learning,¹ as well as practical knowledge. I have also been led to a consideration of the subject by my examinations before the Committees of the House of Commons on the subject of bread and corn. What was before a matter of taste and amusement now becomes a matter of duty; for the present scarcity and high price of provisions is a subject of such high and universal interest that it is of the utmost importance, not only for the members of the Government, but for every individual, to form correct opinions regarding it. As errors among the governed as well as the governing are here peculiarly serious and even dangerous to the public peace, it behoves every good man to endeavour not only to form his own opinions on sound principles and solid grounds, but to the utmost of his power to lend his assistance to others in doing so.

As what I have to communicate would derive no weight from my name, it is of no consequence that it should be made public; but knowing the deep interest your Lordship takes in this question, I court the sanction of your name in thus addressing you, and I submit the following enquiry to you, not only as a member of the Legislature, as one of His Majesty's hereditary Counsellors,

¹ The Author lived in habits of private intimacy with the late Lord Liverpool, Mr. Windham the late eminent Statesman and Orator, the late Sir W. Pulteney, and other persons of extensive political information.

and one of his Ministers presiding over a high department of the State, but also as one who by his independence, his private virtues, and various talents, has conciliated the confidence, respect, and affection of the nation, and who is acknowledged to be a promoter and a judge of whatever is beneficial to society.

In enquiring into the causes and remedies of the present distress, much light may be derived from the retrospect of past times. It appears from history that there has been no famine in this country for more than 350 years, though in that time there have been frequent instances of distress from scarcity and dearth. Famines were frequent, not only before the Norman conquest, during the Saxon and Danish dynasties, but since that era until near the end of the Plantagenet race of Kings. During this latter period, though the records of the times are very imperfect in most other points, they are tolerably satisfactory with regard to this; for it was the custom of the annalists of those days to mark the weather from year to year, and it appears that famines never occurred except after bad seasons. It is, however, probable that what were famines would sometimes have been only cases of extraordinary dearth, had it not been for impolitic institutions and regulations. The laws prohibiting the transport of corn from one part of the country to another, must assuredly have contributed greatly to aggravate the evil, and there is one instance of a regulation to fix the price of provisions in the year 1314, to which historians attribute the famine of the following year. However this may be, it may be considered as a historical fact, that famines never occurred in those nor any other ages, but in consequence of bad seasons. How little they depend on political convulsions may be inferred from hence, that they were unknown during the great struggles of the kingdom, such as the civil wars of York and Lancaster, and those of the King and Parliament. The last famine in England was in 1448, in the time of Henry VI. before the disastrous civil wars of that reign broke out. Some died of want in the great scarcity of 1699, but this was in a time of peace.

As there is reason to presume that the general course of nature for the last 250 years has not been different from what it was before that period, some other causes must be sought for, and some knowledge of the utmost importance to the points in question may be derived from an enquiry into the circumstances which rendered those ages so liable to these severe calamities, particularly the 14th century, which was remarkable for famine and pestilence, all over Europe.

1st. The low state of agriculture. This was owing not only

* See Hume's and Henry's Histories of England.

to the backwardness of those ages in every branch of industry, but to the mean and degrading state in which the laborers in agriculture were held in consequence of the prevalence of feudal and military ideas. The cultivation of the soil was held by the Romans¹ in the rank of a liberal pursuit, whereas in the middle ages all over Europe the most opprobrious terms in language are derived from the condition of this class of the community, such as *roturier*, *villain*, *churls*, *serfs*, &c. It appears that in the 13th and 14th centuries, corn² was sold for more than its weight of animal food. In a still later period, a pound of oatmeal in the Highlands of Scotland was considered as equal to a pound of beef. It is quite the reverse in our days—the reason of this no doubt is, that pasturage, requiring but little exertion of talent or labor, is the favorite pursuit of rude times, whereas agriculture requiring great diligence and skill, flourishes only in ages of civilization and industry.³

We may infer from this, that the proportion of corn to animal food was much less in those ages than in our times. It is probable also that the use of wheat in England was confined chiefly to the upper ranks of society, particularly in the northern counties, and that rye and oats were the grains chiefly in use among the common people, who could not have afforded the prices set against wheat⁴ in the tables of prices. The several grains however must have constituted a considerable proportion of the general subsistence, otherwise the failure of crops could not have caused famines. As civilization advanced, agriculture also advanced, and farinaceous food came to prevail over animal food. Yet even in the 16th century, grain of every species was much higher in price in relation to animal food than in the present times. By an act of parliament of the 25th of Henry VIII. the price of beef, veal, and pork,

¹ The high estimation in which agriculture was held by the Romans, was none of the least causes of their excellent moral habits, as well as of their substantial power and grandeur. Cicero says, "*Nihil agriculturâ melius, nihil uberius, nihil dulcius, nihil liberi hominis dignius.*"

² In order to save the trouble of frequent reference, it may be mentioned that the facts stated in this letter are for the most part taken from Hume and Henry's Histories, and from Smith's Wealth of Nations.

³ See Illustration I.

⁴ When all this is considered, we must make a very low estimate of the population of those times, for there could be no other food for cattle than the spontaneous herbage; the use of sown grasses, turnips, and other species of food for cattle, depending on agriculture, being then unknown. Even the practice of providing provender for winter by hay, was not in use, and it was the custom even after the middle of the 17th century, to kill the cattle in the end of autumn, and salt them for winter provision. To this it was owing that the Sea scurvy, now entirely unknown, was a common disorder in the winter six months; and we learn from medical writers, that it prevailed in London as late as the reign of Charles II.

being considered the food of the poor, was limited to the price of one penny for two pounds, or two pounds and a half, at a time when wheat was sold for seven shillings and eight pence the quarter; so that the former was only at one-twentieth of the present price, while the latter was about one-tenth of the present price. Nay, in the 17th century, wheat bore a much higher ratio to animal food than in our times, for it appears by the Eton tables, so often referred to by authors, that the former bore a higher price during the whole of that century than it did for forty years preceding the year 1773, whereas butchers' meat bore only half the price in the former period of what it did in the latter. Previous to the 18th century, therefore, it appears that animal food constituted the chief sustenance of the laboring poor, and that wheat, which is now their principal food, was little used but by the upper ranks. Oats and rye, even in the southern parts of England, were then the most common farinaceous articles in use. As civilization advanced, and agriculture improved, the proportion of animal food became again greater, for the raising of food for cattle, which formerly consisted solely of natural pasture, has become a great branch of agriculture, not only by the improvement of pasture by tillage, but by the cultivation of hay, turnips, carrots, cabbages, and potatoes. Some of these articles, now the common food of cattle, were, two hundred years ago, considered as delicacies for the human species.

2nd. The next cause of the frequency of famines in those ages, was the scanty production in relation to the numbers and necessities of the consumers, owing to the more simple manners of the times. Before the introduction of refinement and luxury, there was no inducement to produce more than what was required for mere subsistence. The quantity of grain employed in later times in brewing, distilling, feeding of horses, and other heads of unnecessary consumption, becomes a sort of disposable surplus or reserve, which in years of scarcity may be turned into the channels of necessity. It is evident, therefore, though at first sight paradoxical, that luxury, or what on a narrow view would be called waste, is the principal resource and security against famine. In fact, what prospect can be so dreadful, as that in years of common plenty there should be produced just enough and no more than what will suffice for the wants of nature? When this is strictly the case, every bad season must be followed by famine. In consequence of there being no demand, except for the purpose of bare human subsistence, the prices of corn in the periods of

* See Fleetwood's *Chronicon Preiosum*, and other works, referred to by Dr. Price, in his work on *Reversionary Payments*.

our history above alluded to, fell much farther below the average than they do in this age. The consequence of this was that farmers had no motive for keeping up an abundant and equal supply. The unnecessary expenditure in years of plenty, therefore, may be considered as a perpetual public granary, far more permanent and less precarious than any that could be made in store-houses, where grain is liable to deterioration and decay, from vermin or putrefaction, and which requires unremitted vigilance to maintain and replenish. However commendable and expedient it may be therefore to make retrenchment in the above mentioned articles of luxury, under the pressure of scarcity, it would be highly impolitic and dangerous to make such retrenchments perpetual.

3rd. The want of internal commerce. It appears from the records of those times, that there was no method of equalising the consumption of different seasons, for in the course of the same year the price would vary, not by a third or a fourth part; not three or four times, but eight or nine times, as may be seen by inspecting the tables that have been constructed of the annual prices of wheat from the year 1202 till the year 1764. It appears from the same tables, that the plenty of one year was not called in aid of the scarcity of another, for a very wide difference between two consecutive years is observed constantly to occur. It equally appears that the wants and distresses of one part of the country were not relieved by the greater plenty that prevailed in adjoining districts. It is mentioned in the Chronicle of Dunstable, a document frequently quoted by historians, that while wheat was sold at Dunstable for a crown the quarter, it was sold at Northampton for eight shillings. There were in those days many natural and unavoidable obstacles to free intercourse, such as the want of high roads, canals, and posts. But these difficulties might have been surmounted had it not been for a law prohibiting the transportation of corn from one district to another.

4th. There was no corn imported from foreign countries in those ages.

Lastly. What completed the annihilation of commerce, and carried public distress to the highest pitch, was, that the popular odium, and the severity of the laws against dealers in provisions, were then at their height, for all such dealers were proscribed under the contumelious appellation of forestallers, regraters, engrossers, badgers, and jobbers. The monkish authors stigmatise them by every opprobrious epithet which language can furnish: the penalties inflicted by law were forfeiture of goods and chattels, pillory, imprisonment, banishment; and in the reign of Edward III. the punishment was made death by a statute, which was re-

pealed, however, in the same reign. This reign, though so glorious by the splendor of its victories abroad, appears to have been one of the most calamitous as to its domestic interests, for beside the evil of foreign war, famine and pestilence raged with the utmost severity, to which were superadded great political ignorance and considerable civil misrule, of both which the preceding statement, as well as the great depreciation of coin, and the fixing the price not only of the necessaries of life but of labour, may be taken as examples.

When we reflect, therefore, that there was no relief to be derived in case of scarcity, from one season to another, from one year to another, from one county to another, nor from one country to another, we may safely affirm, that of all the causes of famine which have been enumerated, except bad seasons, the want of commerce had the greatest share in producing them.

What then are the changes that have taken place since the middle of the 15th century, which have ever since that time prevented scarcity and dearth from amounting to famine? The more immediate causes seem to have been the freedom of internal commerce, which began to take place about the above-mentioned period, and importation from foreign parts, the mention of which is first met with in history a little later. Not long afterwards, civilization and commerce began to make rapid advances, under the Princes of the House of Tudor, and have continued to flourish and extend themselves ever since, so as in the course of three centuries to raise this country to its present state of unequalled prosperity and grandeur. The improved state of agriculture, and its becoming more honorable, together with the introduction of potatoes, have been additional resources in later times.¹ And it is certainly none of the least advantages concomitant on wealth and industry, that they have been instrumental in preventing such grievous calamities as famine; for however deplorable the evils of the present day may be, how far short are they of what would have occurred in those periods from short crops in two consecutive years, such as the last and the present (1800)? Such an occurrence would then have been productive of famine, and probably of its usual concomitant pestilence: the state of society and manners in those days being such that the stock of food produced and imported, bore a much smaller proportion to the population than in our times; and the prejudices of the age were such as not to allow middle men to apportion and equalize the consumption of different seasons of the year, nor of different districts, as is now so happily exemplified.

Having premised this much with regard to former ages, let us

¹ See Illustration I.

now enquire into the causes of the present scarcity and high price of provisions.

The summer and autumn of the year 1799, were colder and more rainy than in any other in the memory of man, and crops have never in our times been so scanty nor so badly got in. The enormous deficiency of one third of an average crop is the least which any intelligent calculator has assigned, and many have computed it much lower. It was one of those seasons, which in the 14th or 15th century, would certainly have been followed by famine. And how has this been prevented but by those operations of commerce, whereby the consumption of the several seasons of the year, and of the various districts, have been equalized and compensated, and by which the abundance of other countries has been called to our aid? Had the product of last year (1799) been brought to market in winter, in the quantities and at the prices of a year of plenty, who does not see that this must have consumed that portion of the total supply which ought to feed the summer markets? Could this economical reserve for summer subsistence have been effected by any other means than by an advanced price, withholding from the consumption of one part of the year what was necessary for the supply of another? And had there not been persons, whether farmers or dealers, qualified by their enterprize, and enabled by their capitals to accumulate and reserve the articles of life, and to convey them where they were most wanted, we must have gone without bread in the months of June and July last, and we should run the same risk next summer, considering the deficiency of the crop of the present year (1800).

It is thought by many that it would be a most fortunate circumstance for the country, if the farmers and graziers were all to carry their crops and cattle immediately to market, without the intervention of a middle-man. Let us see what would be the consequence of this. If the farmer were a poor man, he would be under the necessity of selling his corn for what he could get, in order to pay his rent; the prices would be at or near those of plentiful years, the market would be glutted, and the article would be consumed beyond the proportion due to the other months of the year, just as happened in what may be called the ages of famine. On the other hand, those farmers who are possessed of some capital, and who can afford to reserve part of their stock in hand for the spring and summer months, must have a much larger profit than a dealer, in order to defray their expences, and to indemnify themselves for their loss of time in bringing so small a quantity to market. Add to this the great cruelty of compelling a farmer or grazier, whether rich or poor, to repair to a distant market at a great expence and loss of time, to the neglect and detriment of his

domestic concerns, which it is of the utmost importance to the public as well as himself, that he should attend to with unremitting labor, undisturbed and undivided vigilance and attention. It is manifest, therefore, that it is only by means of middle-men, possessed of capital, that this salutary system of public economy can be carried into effect. There is here a fortunate, or rather a providential coincidence of private interest with public utility, accomplishing purposes which it is not in the power of human wisdom to bring about by the most elaborate system of regulation. It would in fact be an imputation on that being who has framed the human mind, as well as external nature, to allege that there should exist a discordance in the one any more than the other, from the operation of those laws which are established in the moral, equally as in the physical world. This merchant or middle-man, whether branded with the appellation of forestaller, monopolist, regrater, badger, or other opprobrious term, is he who lays up and reserves for the day of want in one season, what would have been heedlessly squandered in the preceding season, but who in ages of prejudice and ignorance was consigned to persecution, ignominy, and even death. A merchant who deals in other commodities, has in all ages and nations been considered as the benefactor of mankind, engaged in a fair and honorable occupation, conducive to the comfort and accommodation of society; whereas the dealers in provisions have been objects of reproach and contumely, though of all others the most useful to the community.

Let us see whether it is possible to draw a line between what is called a merchant and a middle-man. Suppose a dealer in cattle on a journey from the metropolis with a view to make a purchase in distant parts of the country, and that at the distance of fifty miles he meets a grazier who has brought his cattle fifty miles farther, but instead of proceeding to London, is desirous of disposing of them here, in order that he may save time and expence, and return home to mind the affairs of his farm: is it conceivable that any prejudice can arise to society from the dealer purchasing these cattle at this spot more than if he had purchased them on the farm? Now if this is fair and legal, is it not equally so to make such a purchase at any other distance from the market? If it is not, where is it that fair dealing ends and forestalling begins, is it at one third or two thirds of the journey, is it at Northampton or Dunstable, at Uxbridge or Knightsbridge? Will it be maintained that the owner of cattle will

* In a case tried before the Chief Justice of the King's Bench, about this time, a dealer was convicted and punished for having bought cattle from a grazier who had brought them as far as Knightsbridge, on the way to Smithfield. Some dealers in corn have been tried and convicted in the same manner by the same judge.

part with them at Knightsbridge on any other principle than he would on any part of the road, namely, the saving to himself of time and expence? If this were not the case, why does he not go on to the market and get the same price as the dealer to whom he sells them? It may be said that this dealer may overreach the simple countryman. He is surely much less likely to do so near the market than fifty miles off, where the other has it much less in his power to be informed of the state of the market. But granting that the countryman had been over-reached once, would he or his neighbours who witnessed this, suffer themselves to be imposed on a second time? It is contrary to the first principles of human nature and the practice of human affairs, to suppose that they would. A like answer will serve for all other cases.

I beg to digress for a moment, in order to enter a little deeper into the principles upon which this reasoning, and that which is to follow is grounded.

1st. It is obvious to the most superficial observation, that the only efficient incentives to the bulk of mankind in their labors and their dealings, are self-preservation and self-interest; that it is to these we owe agricultural, manufacturing, and commercial industry and enterprise, with all their productions and materials for the support and accommodation of human life.

2ndly. That men will in general take the most obvious and effectual means of compassing their selfish ends. If one or more individuals act contrary to their fair interest, it is referable to imbecillity or caprice, and is to be considered as an exception, such as occurs in all moral maxims, and like other exceptions, confirms and proves the rule.

3rdly. That it is the part of a wise and equitable government, to protect men to the utmost in those pursuits which have self-preservation and self-interest for their object, in so far as they do not by violence, fraud, or injustice, infringe the rights of others; and that in such protection consists the whole duty of government. Unless each individual were to make himself and his family the principal objects of his care, our species could neither be sustained nor continued: the whole energy of productive labor constituting industry, hinges on this. The very existence of the whole community depends on the labors of the ploughman and the weaver; but it would argue great ignorance of human nature, to ascribe any other motive to these laborers than their own maintenance, or to consider it as an imputation on the purity of their moral character that general beneficence constitutes no part of their inducement in the exercise of their toil and skill.' In order there-

¹ This is happily illustrated in the following passage in the work of a profound and elegant writer, "Men are tempted to labor and to practice

fare to call forth the various faculties and talents, subservient to the wants of society, not only the protection of persons and the security of property seem necessary, but the most perfect freedom in augmenting, improving, and disposing of it within the limits already mentioned. It is this, if I mistake not, which constitutes the dearest part of civil rights and liberties, from which (according to some of the best judges), more than from our political rights and liberties, is derived that enviable state of prosperity and happiness, by which the situation of this country stands contrasted with the tyranny and false policy prevailing in most other nations of the world.

4thly. That commerce is rendered equitable and beneficial to the parties and to the community at large, by the seller endeavouring to get as much as he can for his commodity, and the buyer giving as little as he can, while the former is constrained to part with his article, and the other induced to accept it by another and a different contention which takes place between dealers endeavouring to gain a preference at market by underselling each other. By this double struggle, equity and reason are maintained by virtue of moral causes in the commercial world, just as the frame of the universe is upheld in its existence and harmony, by the compound operation and counteraction of physical forces; and it seems nearly as presumptuous to meddle with the one as with the other, the frame of the human mind being as much the work of divine wisdom as the natural world.

5thly. It follows from these principles, that prices must always stand in the compound proportion of supply and demand. This at first sight may appear peculiarly hard with regard to articles of the first necessity: quite the contrary, for by these, and by no other means or contrivance, can consumption be regulated, so as to conform to the increase or diminution of the stock in hand. If the holder of an article has an abundant stock, he will part with it at a lower price in order to make sure of disposing of it, and *vice versé*. The advantages attending a high price in case of short stock are, first, that it forms a motive to the consumer for economy, tending to make the existing quantity adequate to the wants of the whole year. 2ndly. It serves as a criterion and standard for the degree of supply called for from importation, for importation is not undertaken from any computation or ascertained knowledge of the shortness of the stock in hand, except in so far as the

lucrative arts by motives of interest. Secure to the workman the fruits of his labor, give him the prospects of independence and freedom; the public has found a faithful minister in the acquisition of wealth, and a faithful steward in hoarding what he has gained. The statesman in this can do little more than avoid doing mischief.—*Ferguson's Essay on the History of Civil Society*. P. iii. Sect. 4.

wants of the community are expressed by high prices, affording a motive for commercial enterprize, in conformity to the principles of human nature above explained.

Sixthly, It equally follows from these principles that it is for the benefit of society, that prices should be permitted to adjust themselves spontaneously, according to the relations of supply and demand. That markets should not be disturbed by the interference of the magistrate, whose whole function is *protection*; that the hand of power must in all cases be kept off, as pernicious in the commercial intercourse of individuals, and peculiarly dangerous with regard to those who deal in articles indispensable to human life; so that the inference upon the whole matter in question is, that *security* and *competition* are the indispensable and sole requisites for attaining in perfection the advantages derivable to mankind from industry and commerce.

To return. The prejudice conceived against middle-men, depends on a fallacy which a little sagacity will detect. A hasty and shallow consideration of the subject leads many, among whom are some of the more enlightened class of society, to imagine that in these transactions there is an accumulated profit obtained, at the expence of the consumer. They apprehend that the grower parts with his commodity to the middle-man on the same terms he would do to the consumer. This is not the case. It cannot be the case. He lets the middle-man have his corn or cattle for less than he himself would accept at the market, and which of reason and necessity he must and ought to have, had he been at the additional expense of time and money in proceeding to the market. Nay more, it can be made plain to the meanest capacity, that the middle-man, on the more enlarged scale on which he deals, can afford to take smaller profits on each transaction than the grower could on a smaller quantity of the article,* so that the public is demonstrably a gainer by this transaction.

But it is alleged that when articles constituting the necessities of life, get into the hands of great merchants, who are smaller in number as their dealings are more extensive, they are thereby enabled to combine by acting in concert so as to command the market and to produce all the effects of a monopoly.

I beg here the closest attention while I detect this most dangerous and specious fallacy; and if I should happily be able to do justice in words to those grounds upon which my own conviction is founded, I am confident I shall carry the like conviction to the mind of every man of ordinary understanding, who divesting himself of passion and prejudice will candidly lend his attention.

* See this admirably illustrated in Smith's *Wealth of Nations*. Vol. I. p. 106-112.

I believe that according to all the rules both of law and of logic, the *onus probandi* lies on the affirmative side of a question. It is fair therefore to set out by calling for the proofs of these combinations and monopolies. I have hitherto heard nothing but gratuitous assertion, and when the advocates for the existence of these abuses are called upon for proofs and have not been able to produce them, we have been told that though there may be no express covenant between the dealers or producers of corn, cattle, or butter, there is a virtual or tacit one implied in the community of interest, which binds them together. But this remark, if there is any force of truth in it, will apply to every branch of trade whatever; so that there could be no such thing as fair dealing in the world. Commerce itself, in the most comprehensive sense of the word, would, if this principle were admitted, be only another term for conspiracy and oppression, and no article could at any time or in any place be procurable at a just and reasonable rate. The truth is that the interested efforts of the seller are duly counteracted and controlled by the like motive in the buyer, and it is this struggle combined with the relation between supply and demand, constituting and regulating that competition which ascertains and fixes the intermediate and fair point in the price of all articles at market.

When they are pressed still farther for proofs they allege that provisions differ from all other goods in this respect, that they are indispensable to life, the consumer has no option, as in many other articles, and must therefore take them on any terms. But if there were any truth in this observation, society would be more or less exposed to this wrong at all times. The same capital can with equal ease purchase a large quantity at a lower rate as it can a smaller quantity at a higher rate, so that it would be equally in the power of middlemen at all times to deal out provisions at an exorbitant price in a year of plenty, as in a year of scarcity. What were these monopolists about in years of common plenty? for if it is true, as they allege, that the scarcity is not real, in what does this year differ from any other? Are monopolists like locusts, whose visitations occur from no visible cause and at such uncertain intervals as neither to be foreseen nor prevented. If the power of monopolists over the articles of subsistence depended on the diminished quantity of the stock in existence, there occurs every year, even in those of the greatest plenty, a period, the months of May and June, for instance, in which this stock is smaller than in a year of the greatest scarcity in the months of October or November. If the alleged abuses were real, therefore, the community would be more exposed to them in the former than in the latter case.

If such abuses were practicable, it does not appear why they should not extend to other articles of necessity as well as provisions,

for these are not the only necessities of life. In this climate raiment is as necessary as food, but I have never heard that unfairness and oppression in the price of cloth has ever been matter of public grievance or popular clamour against the dealers in it; nor have manufacturers and merchants ever been the butts of that indignation and odium with which farmers and middlemen have been traduced and assailed; though the articles of wearing apparel, from the manner in which they are produced, the more limited number of those who deal in them, and from their being less perishable, are infinitely more susceptible of becoming the objects of combination and monopoly than corn. The supply of cloth is indeed not so fluctuating as that of corn, for it does not depend on seasons, but this argument will not avail those who deny the existence of scarcity and impute the distress to the abuses of dealers. The like reasoning will apply to butchers' meat, salt, leather, and coals. What distinguishes the products of agriculture from all these is the fluctuation of the supply depending on the variable nature of seasons, from the uncontrollable course of nature, but imputed by the vulgar to moral in place of physical causes. Though the quantity of butchers' meat is in some measure dependent on agriculture, according to the modern method of feeding cattle, the influence of seasons on the supply, is not in the least to be compared to that of corn; and it is truly admirable to contemplate the regular, adequate and fair supply of animal food to this metropolis, flowing quietly from Smithfield, as from a reservoir, to the mouth of every individual, after ramifying into all the channels of consumption, without exciting public clamor, and without the assistance of assize or of any regulation of price or rule of distribution, but what arises out of the spontaneous operation of supply and demand, undisturbed by human interference, and working in the same silent and salutary manner as the circulation of the blood or any other process of nature.

There is another blind infatuation on this subject, which it belongs to this place to expose, namely, that during times of scarcity certain articles of food are destroyed with a view to enhance the price of what remains. We are told, for instance, that the Dutch, in consequence of sometimes widely mistaking in their calculations of the quantity of the spices required for the markets of Europe, by reason of the remoteness of their settlements, and finding on their arrival that they have imported much more than they want, throw a large proportion of them into the sea. I am not competent to decide on the truth of this, but it may be safely admitted that there is nothing incredible in such an operation of commerce being practised upon a superabundant article of luxury, the spontaneous production of those remote possessions from whence

they are brought. But if we were told, that when the Dutch destroy their spices, it is not when they are superabundant, but when they are most scarce, who could believe this? This it is, however, which is alleged with regard to corn; and it is with a mixture of pity and disgust that we sometimes hear persons of rank and education far above the vulgar, profess their belief in this strange dogma. If any one could be found at once so wicked and foolish as to practise this, it would certainly be in years of the greatest abundance. But when we reflect that it is not in times of overflowing plenty, but in those of scarcity and distress, that this enormity is said to be committed; that it is not on an article of luxury, but on a necessary of life; that it is not on a spontaneous production of the earth, but on the most precious fruit of human toil; insanity itself could not be guilty of it, nor could any thing but fatuity give credit to it; and the belief of it is as disgraceful to human reason, as of any of the dogmas of the most groveling superstition.

The outcry that has been raised against large farms may be adduced as another example of popular error on the subject of provisions. It is unnecessary to enter into calculations to prove the advantages resulting from the smaller proportional number of horses kept in large than in small farms, and the advantages of the former over the latter in admitting greater scope for a due succession of crops, as well as every other advantage enjoyed by every other manufacturer on an enlarged scale, enabling him to produce the greatest possible quantity of his commodity for the use of man at the least possible expense, and thereby to undersell others, to the great and manifest benefit of the consumer. Without dilating on these topics, it is only necessary to refer to one incontrovertible fact, namely, that it is by large farms alone that markets are or can be supplied; for small farms either yield no more than what subsists the cultivators, or so little surplus, that neither towns, the manufacturing population, the army nor navy, nor in short any purchasers or consumers of provisions, could be adequately supplied by them. It is a self-evident proposition that the more food that is produced over and above what is required for the subsistence of those who raise it, so much the better it is for a manufacturing community such as ours; for there will be the more to bring to market, so as to increase the ratio of the supply to the demand, the circumstance which alone can keep down prices. It is the augmented production of the staple articles of life, which is alone deserving of consideration in the eyes of the truly enlightened and patriotic; and it excites our pity to hear those who ought to know better, arguing seriously in favor of small farms, from the greater quantity of poultry, pigs, and eggs, which they send to market.

The laws enacted in the reign of Edward VI.¹ show the shallow and false conceptions of all ranks in that age, on the subject of the trade in corn; and tended still further to foster and countenance popular prejudices. They were admitted on the rolls of Parliament about the same time that transubstantiation was expunged from the canon-book, and seem to have been the worthy successors of that article of faith. One can as easily believe that bread is beef, or that beef is bread, as that bread or beef of a wholesome quality can, in time of scarcity and public distress, be destroyed by any human being for avaricious purposes, or that the whole body of farmers, graziers, and dealers in provisions, in the kingdom, can enter into a conspiracy against the consumers. In the age of Edward VI. knowledge had made great advances, and had established the reformation; but this is a proof, among many others, how slow such advances are; nor ought we to wonder that prejudices and errors should then exist, which are prevalent in this more enlightened age.²

In the early ages of commerce, the emoluments of it were confined to a few individuals. Any one possessed of a moderate capital, with sagacity to avail himself of it to the utmost, soon outstripped his poor and more ignorant neighbours. In the fifteenth century, there arose in Europe a family³ of merchants, which by successful commerce attained to the dignity and importance of sovereign princes, so as in the succeeding century to give two queens to France, and three pontiffs to Rome. In the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries there were much richer merchants in London than in the present times, though commerce has increased a hundred fold. There are now thousands who attain competency, hundreds who obtain opulence, but there are none who by com-

¹ Statutes of the 3rd and 4th of Edward VI. chap. 19, and 21; 6th of Edward VI. chap. 14; 7th of Edward VI. chap. 14.

² There was one just and real cause of complaint, which contributed more perhaps than any other cause to the distressed state of the markets at one period of this reign. This was the state of the coin, with regard to debasement and deficient weight and quantity, as well as the want of a due adjustment of the value of gold and silver to each other. This produced such serious inconvenience, that the graziers and other owners of the necessaries of life did not know what to ask nor take in exchange for them; and either parted with their commodities with reluctance, or carried them back and never returned. The monetary system began to be improved towards the end of this reign, and was completed in that of Elizabeth. See *Treatise on the Coin of the Realm*, by the Earl of Liverpool. London, 1805. p. 91.

³ The house of Medici is here alluded to. This family was originally of the medical profession, as their name implies. One of them was enabled to found this illustrious race of princes by the wealth which he acquired from a contract for supplying Florence with fuel; but it was the trade in silk which chiefly maintained their future splendor.

merce alone attain to princely fortunes. What merchant now can be compared with Sir Thomas Gresham, the founder of the Royal Exchange; or with Mr. Sutton, the founder of the Charter House? It was in those ages that the founders of some of the most illustrious families of England acquired their wealth by commerce, and the situation of first magistrate of London was no uncommon road to the peerage. In those days monopolies and combinations must have been much more practicable on account of the general ignorance and want of competition. But it is to be remarked that none of the great fortunes above alluded to were amassed by dealers in the necessaries of life. Monopolies detrimental to the general interests of society were not uncommon in those ages, but they were created by public authority, and extended only to certain branches of foreign trade. How much more impossible must monopolies and combinations be in our days when capital is so diffused, and when every thing is kept to its just and salutary level by a system of fair and equitable² competition! Let any one reflect for a moment, that in order to establish a combination or monopoly in the necessaries of life, not only all the merchants, factors, jobbers, and middlemen of all descriptions, but all the growers must concur in forming a conspiracy against the public, mutually pledging their faith that not one of them will undersell the other, and let him ask himself if he can believe this. It is deemed a thing next to impossible that a conspiracy against the state, comprehending ten or twelve persons, can remain long a secret. How comes it, then, that out of so many thousands of farmers, graziers, and dealers, none have ever yet peached? The only difficulty in refuting such an opinion is the difficulty of finding adequate words to express and expose its absurdities. Not the least proof has ever been brought of the existence of such combinations and monopolies, so that to

¹ The writer need make no apology to the noble families of Osborne, Gower, Waldegrave, and Capel, for ranking them with the House of Medici. It is remarked by Mr. Peunant, in a book entitled *London*, that the grandfather of Queen Elizabeth, and father of the Earl of Wiltshire, was a merchant in Cheapside.

² The present equable diffusion of moderate wealth cannot be better illustrated than by remarking, that in this age many palaces and superb mansions have been pulled down or converted to other purposes, while none have been erected on the like scale. Somerset House, the Savoy, Bloomsbury House, York House, now converted into small private residences under the name of Albany, Cumberland House converted into the Ordnance Office, and others, not to mention the numberless Baronial mansions and castles in all parts of England, now in ruins, may all be adduced as examples of the decrease of inordinate wealth. On the other hand, the multiplication of commodious dwellings for the upper and middle classes of society, and the increased comforts of all ranks, not only in the metropolis, but in the whole kingdom, exhibits a picture of individual happiness and public prosperity, unknown in any other age or country.

attempt to prove a negative would be fighting with a phantom. Gratuitous assertions are as boundless as the wild imaginations of man, and endless as the affirmative propositions arising out of the possible combinations of language. He, therefore, who would engage to prove that universal combination and monopoly, with regard to the necessities of life, do *not* exist; or that these necessities are *not* destroyed, through avarice, during dearths and famines, would be undertaking the same sort of task as any one who should undertake to prove the negative of the dream of an enthusiast or a lunatic. It is impossible any longer to treat the subject seriously, and an apology would be due for saying so much, were it not a fact that the peace and safety of the community have been endangered by the prevalence of such extravagant opinions.¹

We hear daily from persons not otherwise deficient in good sense, that one of the principal causes of the present high price of provisions is the quantity of capital in the country, and the facility of obtaining money or credit, particularly from country bankers,² whereby dealers are enabled to engage in speculations, and prevent corn from being brought to market. This is one of the most common popular errors. With a view to refute it I only require the following *postulatum* to be conceded, namely, that men, however rich, or however much at a loss to employ their money, will not engage in any trade, but for the purpose of gaining by it. Now it is evident that if such speculations keep up the article beyond a certain point, they must lose either by being overtaken by a plentiful crop, or by the spoiling of their corn in the granaries, and if it is short of that point, these capitalists are the benefactors and saviours of the community, by gradually feeding the market and by reserving such a stock as, under the influence of security of property and the check of competition, will exactly serve to carry us round the year, and this on terms proportioned to the total stock of provisions, provided their speculations have been made upon sound grounds; for in this case their profit and advantage would be coincident with the public advantage; as their loss would with the public loss, had their speculation been injudiciously conceived. And we have here another proof that fair and enlightened self interest is not only safe but beneficial, nay, indispensable in furthering the best interests of the community. It would indeed be a solecism in the creation, an anomaly in the wise and beneficent adjustments of providence so admirable and conspicuous in the government of the world, to suppose that it could be otherwise.

It appears that last year (1799), the speculators calculated on

¹ Since this was written, the author has met with Mr. Burke's letter to Mr. Pitt on this subject, written in 1795, in which it is treated with all the eloquence and vigor of mind characteristic of that great man.

² See Illustration II.

deficient there for the preceding seven years, on account of the devastation of the Hessian fly.

The scarcity occasioned by the bad season last year (1799,) being established as the main cause of the high price of provisions, let us next enquire whether there are not subordinate and secondary causes of it. Several of these have been urged with plausibility and possibly with truth.

1st. The depreciation of money.¹ The same denomination of coin will not go half so far in purchasing the articles of subsistence as they did forty years ago; and the question is whether the wages of labor have kept pace with this. It is well known that wages have been greatly raised within these few years as well as the pay of the army and navy. Whether they ought to keep exact pace with the depreciation of money, is a very difficult and delicate question, but it would be highly impolitic to raise wages at any time by law, and it would be highly impolitic and even dangerous to do so in a case of temporary distress such as the present;² for they could not be reduced without the risk of popular commotion, and the great resource against famine, founded on diminished consumption, would thereby be done away.

2dly. The increased consumption on account of the war. This is a point which admits of pretty accurate solution by calculation: The number of land forces employed is under 200,000; but let them be taken at that: the number of seamen and marines voted by Parliament is 120,000. The prisoners of war have at times exceeded 30,000,³ though at present under that number. Now, the two first classes would be consuming provisions, wherever they were, and provisions of this country, were they all at home; but a very large proportion of them are on foreign service, and maintained chiefly from the production of other countries, not to mention the diminution of consumers by the sword and deadly climates. It is true that soldiers and sailors consume more provisions, particularly animal food, than they would in the situation of peasants and artisans. Let it be admitted that they consume twice as much; which is certainly above the truth, This being assumed, the

¹ See Illustration III.

² In order to avoid the raising of wages, the government resorted to the temporary expedient of making an allowance from the poor's rates to laborers with large families. After the scarcity it was found not possible to discontinue this allowance, and it is found to add greatly to the evils of the poor's rates, by encouraging the idle and improvident habits of the laboring class of the population.

³ The author having been at that time a commissioner of sick and wounded seamen, and the prisoners of war being then under the direction of that board, he had the opportunity of accurate information on this subject. In the two last years of the war, that is 1813 and 1814, they amounted to more than 60,000.

whole number, that is 320,000, are to be considered as additional mouths. To these the prisoners of war being added, the whole number of additional consumers is 350,000. The population of the three kingdoms is about 15 millions.¹ This increased consumption therefore is not quite one 43rd part of the whole. Now what should we say to the master of a family who should allege that he has wherewithal to maintain 43 persons, but that if a single individual were added, it would be productive of the greatest distress to the whole? Is there a man deserving of the name of a Briton who can entertain so mean an opinion of the spirit and resources of his country, or who can employ so pitiful an argument to vilify the public counsels, or to cramp those national exertions so salutary, and at this moment so indispensable to the public welfare and defence. There is no point better ascertained from authentic history, than that war, whether foreign or civil, has had no effect in creating scarcity. The prices which have been extracted from public records both by authors and parliamentary committees, are completely in proof of this. It may be asked, whence has arisen the popular persuasion of the contrary, a persuasion which has been so cruelly abused by the factious and ignorant, for the purpose of exciting public discontent? We can only refer it to that catalogue of popular errors and prejudices so prevalent among the vulgar; and in the present instance perhaps no other nor better reason can be assigned, than that the words *Peace* and *Plenty* happen to have the same initial letter, which gives them that alliterative quality, of which almost all popular adages partake.

It has also been attempted to connect the war with the scarcity, by alleging that the high prices are referable to the enormous taxes and loans, accumulated to an unprecedented and unheard of amount. There can be no doubt that these, by multiplying² the circulating medium, have a tendency to depreciate money, and thereby to unsettle the due ratio between wages and the price of provisions.² But as this has had no effect in checking productive industry (the true and only criterion and constituent of national prosperity): it must be admitted to stand low in the list of evils. An evil however it undeniably is, though a necessary one, being the price as it were or sacrifice called for by that system of defence and self preservation, which alone could save the country in the late and present convulsed state of the world; but considered as a crimination of ministry, it is at once so shallow and captious as to require no further notice.

¹ By the population returns of 1801, the population of Great Britain was 10,943,646, and the lowest computation of that of Ireland is four millions.

² See Illustration III.

Sdly. Agriculture not keeping pace with population and manufactures. Dr. Goldsmith has been heard to confess that his poem entitled the *Deserted Village*, is merely a poetical fiction; and Dr. Price's statements, and reasonings in proof of the decrease of population in England, have been completely upset and refuted both by facts and inference. A friend of mine extremely conversant in such researches, has inferred from the study of Doomsday book and other documents that the population of England, at the conquest, was not more than one sixth of what it is at present. When the low state of agriculture is considered, and that the greater part of the subsistence was then derived from animal food produced by the natural herbage; when it is considered how slowly all improvements advanced for several subsequent ages, under the discouragements of feudal oppression and barbarism, and what great accessions have been made to the food of man in the late and present century, by improved and extended agriculture and the introduction of potatoes, it will not appear surprising that the population should be six times greater than at the conquest. It appears clearly from parliamentary returns and other documents, that the increase of population in this reign alone is equal to the whole population in the 11th century. The growth of London, Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Leeds, Hull, and other towns, affords sufficient proof of the great increase of numbers in the seats of trade and manufactories, while there is no proof of the decrease of it in villages.

There is still another circumstance from which the rapid increase of population in this reign is deducible. Notwithstanding the prodigious accessions to the general mass of subsistence in this period, it has not kept pace with the accessions of consumers, as is demonstrable from the statement already made of the almost total cessation of exportation for near forty years, and the great increase of importation in the same time. Now a moment's reflexion will account for this; for the greater part of the manufactured articles not being for domestic, but for foreign consumption, a disproportionate share of capital and labor is directed to manufactories in preference to agriculture. And it seems both natural and reasonable that as other countries take off the redundant products of our looms, forges, and potteries, that we should take off the redundant products of their fields. Corn indeed as an article of commerce is in no respect different from any other manufactured commodity, in so far as relates to supply and demand; but being a necessary of life it is more the subject of jealousy and alarm. It may be asked why cloth being also a necessary of life, is not in like manner the object of public prejudice. As it is much less perishable than corn, it would be much more easily monopo-

See Illustration II.

lised and hoarded, if this was possible. The reason why this article has never been the subject of public clamor, seems to be that the supply is more abundant, and that it is not subject to fluctuations as corn is from bad seasons.

The inference from the whole of this is, that the increase of population has rendered importation necessary for a long series of years, even in seasons of ordinary plenty, and much more so the last two years on account of bad crops; that nothing but a vast deficiency in these years could render such an unparalleled amount of importation necessary; and that nothing can argue more deplorable shallowness and ignorance, than the opinion of those who maintain that there has been no real scarcity.

4thly. The prosecution of those who are invidiously styled forestallers and regraters. It has already been abundantly proved that no definition can be given which can discriminate forestallers from other dealers. All dealers therefore must be apprehensive of being deemed criminal by construction of law. This crime is not a *malum in se*; no man's conscience therefore can point it out to him, and it differs from all other *mala prohibita*, in not admitting of any definite or recognisable description; so that under the influence of such ambiguous and unconscious guilt, they must live in perpetual dread of our tribunals, such as we conceive heretics to do under the awe of the inquisition.

Now there is no maxim in commerce better established, than that profits ought to bear proportion to risks, and this is so fully recognized in the practice of trade, and its reasonableness so evident, that it could be losing time to set about proving it; but the present subject affords an apt example for its illustration; for when a dealer subjects himself to the penalties and opprobrium incident to a legal prosecution, and to the still more terrible vengeance of a deluded and incensed populace, aiming at the destruction of his character, property and life, will it be a small additional profit which will compensate for all this? Those men of character and capital who are timid, will be driven from the trade, and the transport of provision, indispensable to the subsistence of the community, would be at an end. What has saved us from this evil, and from the horrors of conflagration and massacre, but the country being in a state of armed preparation, on account of the external dangers of the state? What have those to answer for, therefore, who have by printed and oral representations (not intentionally, I admit, but ignorantly) goaded on the multitude to acts of outrage and persecution against innocent, useful and estimable individuals, thereby aggravating the public distress by striking terror into those who supply the markets. The mob might have been the victims of their own fury, had they not been met by a firm and temperate resistance. Doctrines of

the most dangerous tendency had been propagated from the bench, the bar, the hustings, the press, and even the pulpit countenancing the popular prejudices and passions which incited to those acts. Let us not however withhold our meed of praise from the common-council man, who having too hastily and credulously related in a late public speech, the history of a family alleged to have been driven to despair and suicide by famine, which was found by enquiries on the spot to be totally void of truth, took occasion at one of the next public meetings to make amends by correcting his former statement, and of recanting what he had said with regard to his belief in monopolies and combinations. And may we also presume to hope that those virtuous and learned judges whose decrees and authority carry such deserved weight, may be also led to re-consider a subject on which, as it lies out of the tract of that technical knowledge, and those professional habits and studies to which they so honorably devote themselves, it is no disgrace for them to have formed a hasty opinion?

It is not meant here absolutely to deny that the abuses alluded to can in no case exist. There is no proposition depending on moral evidence, which is not liable to exceptions. It is conceivable, nay probable, that by some rare concurrence of circumstances, particularly where society is on a small scale, the dealers in the necessities of life may have had it in their power to controul the markets and exact more than a fair profit. Under the imperfect state of human nature, and the variable state of human affairs and institutions, the conduct of a government, in enacting and dispensing laws, must be guided with regard to what is expedient, by averages and approximations gathered from a fair induction of facts, so as to attain the greatest practicable, though not the greatest possible good, by adopting in short what is best upon the whole: and we hope it has been demonstrated that it is by far best upon the whole that protection and fair competition are the only safe-guards of society, though in spite of these there may arise single instances of oppression. And does it not become the disputants in all questions of this nature, in that spirit of candor inseparable from liberal men, on the one side not dogmatically to assert that their rule admits of no exception, while the other side should beware least, misled by some specious and insulated facts, they erect an exception into a rule?

5thly. The assize of bread. Historians mention that this was first instituted in the reign of Henry III. so that it may be said to be co-eval with parliament, and therefore venerable on the score of antiquity. This was nevertheless an age of darkness and ignorance. This law, by establishing a maximum of profit, directly militates against the freedom of commerce, and must therefore be pernicious to society, if there is any reason or justice in those principles now

admitted by all enlightened men, and which it is one of the main objects of this letter to illustrate. I shall endeavour to point out some of its inconveniences which have not commonly been attended to.

1st. The baker, in consequence of his profit being fixed, has but little inducement to buy his flour as cheap as he can, which he would do, were his profits to accrue to him like those of other tradesmen. This is sufficiently obvious. But there is another consequence not so obvious, though equally certain, and to which I solicit the most particular attention. The miller knowing that he may have what price he pleases from the baker, is little anxious how much he gives the farmer. The baker has even an interest in buying his flour at a high price, and in reporting to the magistrate only the highest price which he gives, excluding the flour of inferior quality; for as part of his profit depends on the number of loaves he can bake over and above the statutory number in a sack of flour, his profit will be greater, the higher the price. He has been accordingly known to have offered more to the miller than he asked. Who does not see that the greater the scarcity the greater the temptation to these practices? who does not see that it is to this, together with the discouragement given to the supplies of the markets, and not to the *chimæras* of forestalling and monopolising, that we are to look for the real causes of the price of bread being higher than the scarcity will warrant.

2ndly. The above mentioned objection will apply to the assize in

* However true this may be in so far as it relates to the baker, I have, since writing this letter, been inclined to doubt of its truth, as it relates to the farmer. Archdeacon Heslop published a tract in 1801, entitled a Comparative Statement of the food produced from arable and grass lands. In the Appendix to it he makes a remark equally new and ingenious as it is important and incontrovertible, tending to prove that the fair return to a farmer ought not to be in the simple inverse proportion of the comparative amount of the yearly crop. In order that a farmer may be enabled to live and pay his rent, the price of corn in a year of scarcity should be so far increased as to afford a sum equal to that of a year of average plenty. The reasonableness of this is self-evident, and it would appear at first sight that this increase ought to be in the simple inverse proportion of the deficiency of the crop: for instance, if the crop should have fallen short one half or one third, that then the price demanded ought to be one half or one third more. A more close attention will demonstrate the fallacy of this; for suppose the total annual average production of a farm to be fifty quarters, the farmer after reserving a sufficiency for the support of his family and for seed, which are computed at two-fifths, can bring 30 quarters to market, wherewith to pay his rent and have a living profit. A bad year occurs, in which the total production is only one-half, that is 25 quarters. From this let 20 be deducted for sustenance and seed, there remains only 5 to bring to market, that is, one-sixth of the average year, in place of one half, as had been hastily computed. The same rule will apply *pro rata* whatever the degree of deficiency may be.

the abstract ; but I beg to point out some great error in the particular manner in which it is now conducted.

The difference in the price at which white and brown bread is directed to be sold, remains the same at whatever price bread may be. The difference in price of one species of loaf from the other, is by the present regulation three halfpence, so that supposing the price of the white loaf to be sixpence, the price of the brown or household would be four-pence halfpenny, that is, one-fourth less ; but supposing the price of the white loaf to be a shilling, that of the brown would be ten-pence halfpenny, that is, one-eighth less. Is not this giving an increasing premium on the consumption of white bread proportioned to the rise of the price ? that is, of the scarcity, so that when there is the greatest dearth there is the least inducement to eat brown bread ; and there is a virtual prohibition of it, when most wanted for the relief of the poor.

3rdly. The assize is so set that the baker has a greater interest in selling white than he has in selling brown bread. The flour of which the latter is made is less retentive of moisture in the oven, so that a greater quantity of flour is necessary, in order to yield the same weight of bread. It also requires more yeast. These circumstances are not taken into account in setting the assize.

4thly. It is impossible by means of the assize to make the price of bread to conform to the price of wheat in case of sudden fluctuation, without offending popular prejudice and ignorance. When a fall in the price of wheat or flour takes place, the magistrate immediately sets the assize accordingly, but as bakers have a more or less stock on hand, purchased at a higher price, this leads to evident hardship and injustice, which has occasionally been so gross and glaring as to induce the magistrate to relax the rigor of the law.

It would be tedious here to enumerate all the inconveniences and inaccuracies belonging both to the principle and practice of the assize. They have been pointed out by a very ingenious and respectable clergyman,* who has bestowed great labor and attention on this subject. It is a strong objection to assize in general, that it is not in the power of calculation to construct a table that

* The Rev. Dr. Heslop, in a work intitled *Observations on the Stat. 31. Geo. II.* Though the arguments on this subject were demonstrative and convincing to every enlightened and unprejudiced mind, the assize was not abolished till the session of 1815, when a bill to this effect was brought in by Mr. Frankland Lewis. In a very able report of the Committee on this bill, besides the above stated objections, it was proved by reference made to places where no assize was practised, Birmingham, Manchester, Bath, &c., that the price of bread was lower than where the law of assize was put in practice. The good effect of this abolition, however, is likely to be frustrated in all those towns in which there are corporations of bakers, institutions which can only be considered as legal and organized combinations.

shall be equitably adjusted to all the fluctuations and varieties of the materials. In order to make even an approximation to equity, much more skill and science is required than can be expected from those who are charged with this duty.

From what has been said respecting the causes of the distresses, it is evident that we can promise ourselves no substantial relief but from importation, in so far as regards the temporary evil; and from augmented cultivation, in so far as regards the permanent sufficiency of food in future. As a remedy for the scarcity arising from the bad crop of 1795, the government undertook to import corn on their own account, and to dispose of it with merely a saving profit. This appeared very plausible, and was certainly undertaken with the best intention, but it was soon abandoned; for they could not import a quantity adequate to the want of the whole community; and as this damped all private enterprise, it would have proved instead of a salutary measure a most pernicious one. Great benefit arose from it, however, as it proved a most instructive practical lesson, in confirmation of a principle which it has been one of the chief objects of this letter to inculcate, namely, that the public is never so well served as by free trade and individual competition. No individuals, however large their capital, could enter into competition with the public treasury, under any circumstances; but when that treasury professes to sell at a price at which no private person could afford to sell, this is a virtual prohibition of what is understood by commerce. Though the present scarcity (1800,) therefore is much greater than that of 1795, no such measure has been resorted to.

It is evident that nothing but the extension of cultivation can make our domestic productions keep pace with the increasing population. There has for the last fifty years been an immense addition to the food of man, from numerous enclosures of commons, the improved skill and extension of agriculture, but above all, from the increasing production of potatoes. The population, however, in consequence of the encouragement to rear families, from the demand for hands to carry on those manufactures by which the wants of other nations are supplied, has greatly outstripped these new and increased sources of subsistence, insomuch that from the beginning of the present reign there has been a constant dependence on other countries for the requisite quantity of corn. Since the year 1766 there have been only six years¹ in which the sum total of exported corn of all species has exceeded the imported.

As the late prosecutions of dealers have been manifestly founded on false principles, and have proved highly injurious by obstructing

¹ In every year since this letter was written, that is from 1800 to 1816, the importation has greatly exceeded the exportation.

the supply of the market through the intimidation which they occasioned, it would be advisable to repeal the common law as well as the statute law on this subject. In repealing the law of Edward VI. in 1772, it was an oversight not to have abrogated¹ the common law on this subject at the same time, for convictions have lately taken place on the latter. The preamble to the statute of 1772, and the speeches in the debate, particularly that of Mr. Burke, set the impolitic tendency of the ancient law in the strongest point of view. So great was the impression made on the members of the legislature by this enlightened view of the subject, that on a petition presented by the city of London in 1787, praying a suppression of the practices of forestallers, monopolisers, and regraters, to which they ascribed the high price of provision, the House of Commons refused even to take it into consideration. A like petition was presented in 1796, which was favorably reported upon by a Committee, but was rejected by the House.

In case the total repeal of these laws should not be deemed safe and politic in the present irritated state of the public mind, I beg to suggest with that diffidence which becomes one who does not belong to the profession of the law, that they might be disarmed of their pernicious tendency by enacting, that no conviction shall follow unless it shall appear in proof that the act committed

¹ It was no doubt the intention of the legislature to have abrogated the whole laws relating to this subject, for by not doing so the repeal of the statute of Edward II. proved nugatory, as actions still lay at common law. I was informed by the late Sir William Pulteney, that the following circumstance gave rise to that act of parliament: London was at that time supplied with immense quantities of fresh butter, from that part of Yorkshire called Holderness. The dairies were farmed by London dealers, who were in the practice of accommodating other shopkeepers with what they could not dispose of themselves. It was plain that it was entirely out of the power of farmers to bring this commodity to market themselves, and as it is a very perishable article, the prompt method that has been described was the best possible for the public benefit. In the course of this traffic, however, one of these dealers was brought under the predicament of Edward VI.'s statute, and was convicted. Lord Mansfield, from a principle of justice and humanity, and perceiving that the infliction of the penalty would ruin their trade, contrived to suspend judgment, and suggested the repeal of the statute in the interim.

In 1767, in consequence of complaints concerning the high price of provisions, and petitions having been presented to the House of Commons on that subject, ascribing it to the practices of forestallers, jobbers, &c. a bill was brought into parliament to enforce the law against such offenders; but the Committee appointed to consider these laws, came to the following resolutions, viz.

1st. "That it is the opinion of this Committee, that the several laws relating to badgers, engrossers, forestallers, and regraters, by preventing the circulation of and free trade in corn and other provisions, *have been the means of raising the price thereof in many parts of the kingdom.*

2ndly. "That it is the opinion of this Committee, that the House be moved for leave to bring in a bill to remedy the evils occasioned by the said laws."

In consequence of fresh petitions from the country to the same purport as the former, the matter lay over till 1772, when the above mentioned bill was brought in and passed.

has been a matter of real detriment ¹ to the public or to an individual. Till this or some other security shall be afforded to dealers, men of credit, character and capital, through whom alone a fair and regular supply of the market can be attained, will be entirely driven from the trade which will fall into the hands of hucksters and adventurers. I know for certain that these prosecutions have already had a bad effect, and if they should still go on, will aggravate the evils of the present deficient crop. Notwithstanding of the shortness of this year's (1800) crop, and the want of the assistance usual in other years from the surplus of the preceding one, which is generally equal to the supply of three months or more after harvest, the public will look for some farther fall; and if this shall not happen, it will be difficult to assign any other causes for it than the discouragement of commercial competition, and the great profits necessary to enable growers to bring their own produce to market, or to compensate for the risks to such unintimidated dealers as may continue to supply the markets. ²

Having thus humbly stated what I conceive to be the most expedient and practicable means of relieving and preventing scarcity, there remains only one measure upon which some animadversion is called, as it has been recommended through the press as very advisable in the present *crisis*. I mean the establishment of a *maximum* of price. As the principle of this has been exploded in the most satisfactory manner by all the soundest writers on political economy, I shall not enter into the reasonings on the subject, but only make a few references to history respecting the practical effects of it. It was tried in the reign of Edward II. in the year 1315, under the pressure of a great scarcity, and during one of the worst administrations that England ever saw; but was abandoned on its being found mischievous and impracticable. It was tried in France during an administration still more execrable and flagitious, that of Robespierre, and without the excuse of that ignorance and barbarism which prevailed in the 14th century. Here also it was abandoned for the like reasons, after it had been promulgated in a complicated system of regulations filling two quarto volumes. In referring to ancient history we find similar proceedings. Suetonius cap. 34. mentions, that it was tried at Rome by Tiberius in the plenitude of his tyranny. The Emperor Dioclesian, equally ignorant and tyrannical, endeavoured to quiet the people by instituting a maximum, as we learn from the following passage in Lactantius, *De morte persecutorum*. "*Idem, quum variis iniquita-*

¹ This idea seems to meet with some countenance from an expression of Lord Coke, who says that "an engrosser may be indicted at the common law as for an offence *malum in se*."—*Institutes of the Laws of England*, p. iii.

² See in Illustration IV. the farther means of relief adopted by Parliament in the course of the winter subsequent to the publication of this letter.

tibus. faueret caritatem, legem de pretio rerum venalium statuere conatus est. Tunc ob exigua et vilia multus sanguis effusus; nec venale quicquid metu apparebat, et caritas multo deterius exarsit, donec lex necessitate ipsâ post multorum exitium solveretur." It thus appears that in all ages and countries this measure has been followed by an aggravation of the evil of dearth, with the addition of those of discontent and bloodshed. Though persons in a situation above the vulgar, both in rank and education, are heard approving and recommending this measure, yet, as it is reprobated both by reason and experience, and as it could be dictated only by ignorance and tyranny, and therefore abhorrent to the character of our present rules, it is needless to dilate farther upon the subject.

I have thus, my lord, unburthened my mind, by communicating with all diffidence what I have felt it my duty not to withhold. I am sensible that it might be made much more perfect both in point of matter and arrangement; but it has been composed at those short intervals of leisure, which the duties of an active profession admit of. The whole of this subject is a matter of the utmost delicacy and importance to the cause of humanity and public spirit; upon which it behoves every man to inform himself, and to throw all the light in his power. The first step towards alleviating the miseries of the poor, is to ascertain from whence they proceed; and if we cannot immediately relieve their wants, let us at least soothe their discontents, by endeavouring to convince them, that the evils under which they suffer, are imputable to natural and uncontrollable causes, and not to inflame their passions and exasperate their sufferings, by representing them as flowing from the crimes of their fellow subjects, and thereby impelling them to acts that aggravate the evil tenfold, and lead to the most disastrous and tragical results.

If it were not taking up too much of your lordship's time, it would be interesting and curious to enquire upon what principle the strange credulity of mankind on these points is founded. I shall only shortly remark that it is the nature of the human mind, when galled by suffering, to yield readily to jealousy and suspicion; and in this mood "trifles light as air" are confirming evidence. *Fear* is also very favourable to credulity, and it is upon this that superstitious terrors are chiefly excited. The strongest emotions are created by the horrors of the invisible world. Next to these, animal subsistence seems to excite the deepest interest; as may be exemplified in panics, in the irrational anxieties of avarice, and the blind credulity with regard to the points now under discussion, so that these aberrations of the mind may be termed *temporal superstition*. It is stated by one of the most philosophi-

cal of the classic poets,' as the principal advantage attending the cultivation of reason, that it enables the mind to surmount such vain fears.' But as this subject relates to the indispensable necessities of our animal nature, and is full of specious fallacies, it is perhaps one of those upon which an uneducated mind finds it most difficult to form a correct and dispassionate judgment. The time will come when our more enlightened posterity will be as much astonished, that the belief in forestalling and monopolizing the necessities of life, being the cause of the scarcity and high price of provisions, should prevail at the end of the 18th century, as we are at the grave characters who believed in ghosts and witches at the beginning of the 17th century. It is not quite 200 years since not only the King on the throne and the judges on the bench, but the majority of the whole legislature of England, believed in witchcraft, as appears from an act of parliament passed against that imaginary crime in the reign of James I.; and it appears from the records of that age, that there were several executions in the succeeding reign also for the same offence.

However mortifying it may be to human pride, and however reprehensible that those who are styled the better sort should give into such errors, let us make every allowance for those who have not the same advantages of information, and who living from day to day by their labor, are much more deeply interested in the question, while their birth and education preclude them from the advantages which ought to counteract prejudice in those of more liberal and enlightened minds. When this is duly weighed we ought rather to admire the quietness and patience of the commonalty of England, than be surprised at their late transient and partial excesses. Whoever will study the character of the common people of this island, will find much to admire in them, particularly that aversion to shedding blood, and to the vindictive use of edged weapons, which remarkably distinguishes them from all the nations of Europe, particularly the more southern. How cruel then to abuse the generous nature of such people! It seems incumbent on those in power, on the ministers of religion, and on all persons of education, to sooth, console, and instruct, the industrious artisan and laborer, on a subject in which they are so prone to errors of the most dangerous and fatal tendency; to represent to them that this island is like a ship at sea, on a voyage of twelve months, with an inadequate store of provisions on board, and with a precarious chance of any farther supply, and that too great an expenditure in the beginning of the voyage would induce a famine before they could arrive in port; that therefore it becomes them

Felix qui potuit rerum cognoscere causas
Atque metus omnes et inexorabile fatum
Subiecit pedibus, strepitumque Achærentis arat.—Virgil.

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to submit with Christian patience to being put on short allowance, not giving way to unmanly repinings, much less disgracing themselves by mutiny. This class of society should also have it explained to them, that it is only by means of high prices that general frugality and reduced consumption can be effected: and it might be made plain to them, that the farmer ought to have such a price as to indemnify him for the shortness of his crop, and to enable him not only to continue but to increase his tillage; making them even comprehend that the profits ought in justice to be higher than in the simple inverse proportion of the scarcity, as explained in the note at page 288; that high prices are necessary in order to ensure adequate importation; that the farmers who produce, and the dealers who bring that produce to market for the accommodation and subsistence of the community at large, and of the poor in particular, instead of being the objects of their indignation, ought to be regarded as their best friends.

I have only farther to add, that as this letter is intended for the public eye, and as a question may arise concerning the purity of the author's motives, he thinks it right to declare, that he is not only no dealer in any of the articles of life, but that he has not the smallest acquaintance or connection with any one who is. And lest it should be said that he is probably some one in the pay of government, he equally disclaims this charge. He can bring proof that such were his opinions before these questions were publicly agitated, and that he has freely and publicly declared them since they have been agitated, at a time when it was generally believed that the majority of his Majesty's ministers were of a different way of thinking.

But my great security against the misconstruction of my motives is, that the public think too well of your Lordship to believe that you would suffer yourself to be addressed by a sordid trader or an unprincipled mercenary, but by one whose character is well known to you, and who has the honor to be, &c.

ILLUSTRATION I.—Pages 261. 264.

It is an important feature in the character of the human species, as distinguished from the brute creation, that it could never have attained to the perfection of its nature, whether in point of happiness or intelligence, if it depended solely for its existence and necessary accommodation on the spontaneous productions of Nature. If the articles for maintaining life, referrible to the heads of food, clothing, and shelter, more especially the first, were as independent of our industry as are the necessities of light, air and water, neither the virtues nor faculties of rational nature could even have been developed. In such a state there could be no such thing as property, no play for the active and inventive energies of man, whether mental or corporeal, moral or political, no room for the

talents exercised in productive industry and commercial intercourse, all the mutual and endearing ties and dependencies of social and civilized life, all the trades, professions, arts, and sciences, whether ministering to the necessary accommodation or elegance of life, constituting man's greatest felicity, whether as objects of pursuit or enjoyment, would have been unknown. The agricultural class¹ constituting more than one third of the population of this island, and a much larger proportion in most other countries, could not have existed. This is no where better expressed than by Virgil.² Another poet less philosophical, but in language still more enchanting and animated, has represented a state of Nature in which all things necessary to man were yielded spontaneously, and in which he is exempted from care and labor, as the state of supreme felicity, calling it the golden age. As history does not countenance the existence of any such state of things, we may fairly regard it as a fiction equally remote from truth as it is inconsistent with reason. What the poet paints as a condition of exalted virtue and happiness, the philosopher reprobates as a condition which, if it could exist, would be more miserable and degrading than the rudest state in which any portion of the human species has yet been found to exist.³

Of all the classes of food, there is none so suitable to human life as the farinaceous matter contained in the seeds of certain gramineous and leguminous plants. They are salutary, nutritious, and grateful, and hold a middle rank between recent vegetables and animal food. They are also wisely adapted by Providence as the subjects of tillage, for in the various operations required for raising them and preparing them for food, consists the most healthful occupation, they employ in most countries the largest portion

¹ By the returns of population of England, Scotland, and Wales in 1811, the number of families chiefly employed in Agriculture, was 895,998, in trade, manufactures, or handicraft, 1,129,049; not comprised in the two preceding classes 519,168. The total number of persons composing these families was 12,596,803, exceeding the enumeration of 1801 by 1,654,157. A friend of the Author's, extremely conversant in such researches, has computed from *data*, furnished by doomsday book, that the population at the Conquest could not be more than one-sixth of this, and from the best records that can be found it was about one-third of it in the middle of the 16th, and one-half of it about the end of the 17th century. For the progressive population of this century and the last, see the luminous and ingenious disquisition of Mr. Rickman in his preliminary remarks prefixed to the abstract of the population returns of 1811.

² Pater ipse colendi

Haud facilem esse viam voluit, primusque per artem
Movit agros curis acuens mortalia corda.

³ In illustrating the advantage of food procured by industry, over that which is spontaneous, we may here quote a fact mentioned by Mr. Turner in the narrative of his embassy to Tibet. In passing through Bootan, he remarked that the country was sufficiently fertile in a species of wild rice, to supply the inhabitants with food without labor, but that no people could be more wretched nor worse accommodated in every respect.

of the community, and constitute directly or indirectly the great *stamina* of all opulence and power.

I apprehend there is no better way of illustrating this than by assuming an extreme case by way of contrast. Let us suppose then, an article of food, the bread fruit for example, to be introduced into this or any other agricultural country, affording by its spontaneous production a sufficiency of wholesome food for the whole community. It is conceivable that a sugar colony which exists by the production of a staple article of commerce, and which subsists almost solely on imported food, would bear this; but it is manifest that an article of this kind, which would supplant agricultural labor, would shake to the centre, nay utterly subvert and dissolve the whole frame of civilized society.

But if the principle which this extreme case is meant to illustrate be correct, it follows that there may be certain intermediate cases, wherein, though the same degree of ruin would not ensue, yet the most serious inconvenience and disturbance would arise in the wholesome and established order of things. Is there any known article of food, which though not altogether spontaneous, yet which in its cultivation falls far short of that labor, vigilance, and ingenuity, indispensable in raising and preparing corn for the food of man? Potatoes I apprehend answer to this description; and is it not evident that if this root were to supersede the use of the grains by two-thirds, or even one-half, there would be an approximation to the evils that have been stated as resulting from spontaneous food? This remark is meant to apply to England in case of such an event, and though the proportion is far from being two-thirds, or even one-half, this article has so sensibly encroached on the cultivation of corn as to constitute in the opinion of many one of the causes of the present agricultural distress. With regard to a sister kingdom, where the proportion that potatoes bears to the whole food of the country is probably double or triple, this is not felt as it would be in England, for the state of agriculture was so low in Ireland when they were introduced, that they could not be said to supersede corn, but to come in aid of it. The inconveniences that have been described, have, however, been sensibly felt in Ireland, for to this cause must be referred the poverty, indolence, and vicious habits of that country. Hence the other necessities of life, such as clothing and habitation, do not keep pace with the abundance of the subsistence, and the redundancy of the population; neither have the peasantry the means of giving their children that share of education which is necessary to civilize them; and to this is also referrible the multiplication of atrocious crimes so frequent at this moment, (November 1816) in that country.

Ireland is the only country where this is the dominant article of food. While it remains only a subordinate means of subsistence,

it is inestimable by insuring plenty and by increasing population. It is well calculated also for preventing famines, not only as it is less dependent on weather than the grains, but as it may be made a large proportion of the food of cattle and horses. These cattle themselves not only prove a resource, but a large share of their subsistence may be converted to the use of man in years of scarcity, so that though the use of potatoes may be carried too far as an article of human subsistence, there is not the same objection to their becoming the food of animals to any extent. Nay it seems to be the duty as well as interest of every patriotic and prudent farmer, to use as much as possible of this species of provender for his cattle, sheep, and horses.

ILLUSTRATION II.—Page 280.

The introduction of potatoes has afforded a greater addition to the general stock of subsistence than all the modern improvement in agriculture. There is no other article constituting the sustenance of man, of which so large a quantity can be raised on so small an area nor with so little labor; nor do they exhaust the soils like the grains. They are also more independent than these, of the fluctuation of seasons. It is moreover a virtual highly nutritious and wholesome, and requires no preparation but the simple action of fire. Yet such has been the rapid increase of population in England, that with the aid of potatoes, added to the immense accessions of home-grown corn and cattle, from the great extension of tillage and the improved skill in agricultural operations, the collective mass of subsistence has not kept pace with the augmented number of consumers, insomuch that at no era has there been so much corn imported from foreign countries. This has been owing to the great demand for manufacturing labor, far exceeding the wants of the native population, such indeed as to furnish the materials of an export trade, to an amount unknown in the history of the world. England is peculiarly adapted for supplying other countries with various necessities, accommodations, and luxuries, as well by the spirit of enterprise, generated and fostered by the security of their persons and property, conferred by the constitution of their government and the laws of their country, as by their ingenuity in the invention and application of machinery, by their superior capital, and by the abundance and cheapness of fuel both as a necessary of life, and as a requisite in many of the processes of manufacture. It cannot be denied

¹ It is from pit-coal that Great Britain has to look forward in all time to come for her lasting and exclusive superiority in manufactures, for capital and machinery; her other two advantages may be acquired by other countries. The steam-engine in particular, could not be maintained, but by the cheap and abundant supply of coals peculiar to this island. In a conversation of the author's on this subject with Admiral Apodaca, late minister from Spain to this court, he remarked, that the English coal-mines might properly enough be called their Black Indies, meaning, no doubt, that they were as valuable to this country as those of Mexico and Peru to this country. They are beyond a doubt much more so.

that these are the main constituents of national wealth and power, but it is equally true that agriculture has till lately been robbed of its due share of capital and labor, by the superior profits and higher wages of those engaged in manufactures. Accordingly we find that the great increase of population in our times, has not been in those districts in which the soil is most fertile, but where fuel is most abundant. Those counties in which the population is most dense, and in which it has chiefly increased since the beginning of the last century, are Lancashire, Gloucestershire, Warwickshire, Staffordshire, and the West Riding of Yorkshire. No reason can be assigned for these becoming the favorite seats of industry, but the attraction of abundant and cheap fuel. The soil in some of these is so far from being superior, that in Lancashire, where the greatest increase of population has taken place, it is of an inferior quality.

It is quite plain from all this that the advancement in population in this or any other country is referrible to the motives held out for the encouragement of early marriages, the chief of which is the prospect of persons being able to command a sufficiency of food, fuel, clothing and lodging for themselves and their offspring.

In going a little deeper into this subject, it may be remarked that nature is extremely profuse in the production of the seminal principle, both in the vegetable and animal kingdom. Of the seeds and eggs which are generated, not one in many thousands is developed. It is observed by naturalists that a single thistle produces 24,000 seeds, and that in the roe of a single sturgeon, there is a number of eggs equal to the whole number of human beings on the face of the earth. It may be remarked, that corn itself is a seed of which the purposes of nature require that a very small proportion should be developed in perpetuating the plant. In the animal kingdom, if even the small proportion which is developed, were in some species of animal to arrive at maturity, and if a great part of them were not cut off in early life by disease, by accident, or as food for other animals, the earth would be overstocked.

In the human species the physical powers of procreation are indefinite, for it is demonstrable that no country ever has supported, nor ever can support the number of human beings, which might be brought into existence by the exercise of those powers to their utmost extent. If every male and female were to marry as soon as they are marriageable, the species would double every ten or twelve years, according to the computation of some theorists. But they have been found actually to double in fifteen years. Let this last be assumed as the *maximum*, and if any one will try it by the rule of geometrical progression, he will find that in about 110 years, there would be more inhabitants in the island of Great Britain, than the present amount of the whole human species, reckon-

ing the population of this island to be 12 millions, which is somewhat less than the late enumeration in 1811, and assuming the population of the world, according to a gross computation of some political economists, to be 1,200 millions.

The most rapid increase of population¹ that has been actually ascertained to take place, has been in the English American colonies, where the inhabitants, soon after the first occupation of the soil, doubled in most districts in 25 years, but in one of them in 15 years. It is manifest that this rate of progression could not go on for more than one or two steps,² as no fertility of soil could keep pace with it. The country in Europe, in which there has been by far the most rapid increase of population in this age, has been Ireland. Sir William Petty computed the population of it about the time of the revolution at a million. Captain South, in an article in the *Phil. Trans.* Vol. XXII. p. 518, computes it in the year 1695, at 1,034,102. It appears, from an enquiry, instituted by the Parliament of Ireland in 1732, that the computation then was 2,011,319. Mr. Newenham in an elaborate work published in 1805, entitled, *A Statistical enquiry into the population of Ireland*, computes it at upwards of 5 millions, and calculates that it had doubled in 46 years.

An Act of Parliament passed for the enumeration of the inhabitants of Ireland in the year 1812, but so many difficulties occurred that returns have not yet (November 1816.) been made, but there is good reason to believe that it contains upwards of five millions, so that it has quintupled in about 120 years. There has perhaps, during that period, been less political disturbance and misrule than

¹ See *Political and Philosophical Miscellanies* by Benjamin Franklin, LL. D. P. 263. Lond. 1779.

² This is admirably elucidated by Mr. Malthus in his *Essay on the principle of Population* Page 4, 2d Edition. See also *Price on Reversionary payments*, P. 274. and 282. That there can be no greater number of inhabitants in any country than there is food to maintain them, seems at first sight a mere insipid truism, hardly worthy of being enunciated in words. It has been from over-looking it however, that historical and political writers have been led into gross errors and inconsistencies, nor before the work of Mr. Malthus was it ever clearly laid down and reasoned upon as a fundamental axiom in political economy, that subsistence is the great regulator of population. Neither war, emigration, nor epidemic diseases have any seipitile nor durable effect in impairing population. If subsistence remains undiminished, such losses are immediately repaired. As a proof of the very crude state in which this branch of political science remained at a very late period of English literature, it may be remarked that Lord Lyttleton in his *History of the life of Henry II.* observes¹ that there are no *data* for computing the population of that period, but that it is to be presumed from the orderly habits of the people enforced by strict police, and from the healthy and robust constitutions of the inhabitants, conducive to propagation, that the population must have been great. An author of the present day, versant in what is now deemed the sound principles of political science, would say that considering the scanty stock of nourishment, in consequence of the want of skill in agriculture, which was also depressed in that age, not only by feudal oppression in common with the rest of Europe, but by the vexations and exactions of the Norman invaders, the population must have been very low at that period, and probably under a temporary decline.

¹ See Lord Lyttleton's *Life of H. II.* Vol. 2. P. 336. London, 1767. 1st Edition.

in preceding ages, a circumstance no doubt favorable to that security of person and property, which encourages industry and the rearing of families; but the main and nearly the sole cause has been the abundance of easily procurable food from the introduction of potatoes. The other causes assigned by political writers for the increase of population, namely, wise institutions and the increased demand for labor, could have but little share in it. It is ascribable therefore exclusively, we may affirm, to the facility of procuring food operating as a motive to early marriages. This reasoning, though founded equally on fact, and on the principles of human nature, has been controverted and even slighted and ridiculed by those who will not take the trouble of reflecting seriously on the subject. They allege, that prudential considerations can have but little weight in restraining the animal propensities among the lower orders any where, and least of all in a nation so heedless and improvident as the Irish. This being a curious as well as important subject of research, it may be worth while to take a closer view of it.

Potatoes constitute probably much more than two thirds of the subsistence of the Irish nation, but let two thirds be assumed as the proportion which this article bears to every other. We do not mean to affirm that if this root had never been introduced, the population would amount to only one third of five millions, for in this case the cultivation of corn would probably have been more attended to. Let it be admitted that the population had by these improvements been doubled in place of being quintupled, which is more than a fair allowance; for it is nearly as much as England, a country so much more prosperous, has increased in the same time. This being granted there remain three millions to be placed to the account of potatoes. It may next be asked what would have become of these three millions had potatoes not been introduced? How would they have been disposed of, had this root never been brought to Ireland? They could not have been destroyed by infanticide, this being a practice never known nor heard of in a nation so remarkable for its attachment to offspring. Would epidemic diseases or famine account for the destruction of so many human beings? This is equally contrary to historical truth, for the climate of this country is one of the finest in the world, no country has been less afflicted with pestilential disorders, nor is there any country in the history of which famines have been more rarely recorded, either before or since the introduction of potatoes. It follows that there is no possible solution of this difficulty, but by admitting that had it not been for this new article of food, these three millions of human creatures *would never have been called into existence.*

There is undeniably among all conditions of mankind a check imposed by prudence, which more or less restrains and regulates

the physical powers of procreation, and adjusts population to subsistence. It operates slowly and silently, and therefore not perceptibly, till the accumulated effect become sensible, and affords a demonstrative proof that motives of prudence influence even the most thoughtless, deterring them from such premature marriage, as would render their offspring the victims of want.

There is a very interesting and satisfactory exemplification of this brought out in the Parliamentary returns of parish registers made in 1801 and 1811. During the two years of great scarcity 1800 and 1801, the number of marriages, as appears by these returns, was considerably diminished in the metropolis, and still more in the kingdom at large. The average number of marriages for the five preceding years, was 67,713 : in 1800 they were only 63,429. And in 1801 they were 63,800. The statement in the latter will appear still stronger, when it is considered that the enumeration was made from an amount, including 612 parishes more than the preceding year. This was evidently imputable to the discouragement to marriage among the laboring orders, from the prospect of the difficulty of maintaining a family, under the existing scarcity and high price of provisions. In the first two years after the return of plenty, that is, in the years 1802 and 1803,¹ the number of marriages considerably exceeded the above mentioned average, the number in the former standing 85,845, and in the latter 89,146. This was no doubt owing to the solemnization of the marriages of those who had been betrothed in the years of scarcity, but who had deferred the consummation till better times. That these fluctuations were neither casual nor proceeding from errors in computation, is clearly evinced by the baptisms undergoing a like fluctuation in the corresponding years ; and we have in all this, a fine example of the silent, slow, and imperceptible, but sure and efficient workings of moral causes in regulating, controlling, and meliorating the physical condition of the human species.

When these causes are left to their own natural and undisturbed operation, they produce the salutary effect of adjusting population to subsistence, but when defeated by artificial institutions and perverted notions, the most pernicious consequences result. This is very strikingly exemplified in China, where nature is thwarted by a sentiment interwoven in the national character, originating probably in false policy or superstition, by which celibacy is held to be disreputable. This giving occasion to premature marriages, accounts for that excess of population, which there is no means of repressing, so as to keep it within the limits of subsistence, but by the practice of infanticide. This expedient is so abhorrent to the

¹ It has been before said that the years 1799 and 1800 were the two years of scarcity. This is reconciled with the text above, by remarking that these two years were the years of short crops, but it is not till the subsequent year that want is much felt.

feelings of nature, that it is not carried to such an extent as to be adequate to its end, for we are assured by travellers, that a year never passes without famine being felt in a greater or less degree in one province or another of the empire. Is not the mental and bodily imbecility, the meanness, fraud, and other degrading qualities so conspicuous in the Chinese character, referrible to the anxiety in seeking, and the difficulty of obtaining, the means of supporting life?

There is nothing so conducive to the happiness, dignity, and virtue of man, as the due adjustment of population to subsistence, unless it is that principle by which all parents hold themselves bound, whether from motives of duty, affection, or decent pride, to maintain their own offspring. Wherever this principle is wanting, the sure foundation is laid of misery, vice, and meanness, and it is with the deepest and most heartfelt regret, that every good and considerate man must contemplate these effects, as necessarily flowing from the poor-laws, and the great aggravation of these effects in our time, from a provision made by the legislature in the year 1800, in consequence of the concurrence of scarcity with the depreciation of money, whereby the wages of laborers became inadequate to their maintenance, and it was judged more advisable to direct an allowance from the funds of the poor, than to increase their wages. This provision for the families of laborers and artisans, according to their number, was continued after the scarcity, which alone could justify it, had ceased, and the effect of it on their uncultivated minds, has been to add to those habits of idleness, debauchery, and improvidence, induced by the poor-laws, and to extinguish the last sparks of that *decent pride*, (perhaps more properly termed *self-respect*,) the only guide and safeguard of industry, sobriety, frugality, and chastity. One of the greatest evils engendered by this system, is that of marriages contracted with little other prospect of future maintenance for the parties and their offspring; but the dependance on parish relief; and many of those who earn high wages, are so destitute of every good sentiment and virtuous principle, that in place of prosecuting industry, and laying up a provision for the support and education of their children, or to provide for themselves and their families, in case of sickness, old age, or death, waste the remaining days of the week in dissipating their gains in grovelling and licentious pleasures. To this depravity of morals, bad example, and neglect of education, may be attributed the juvenile delinquency, prevailing at this time in this metropolis to a degree never before known; and it has appeared from the researches of a committee of the House of Commons appointed to enquire into the state of the police, that these vicious children were uneducated, whereas in a report by Mr. Raikes, it appeared that of 4000 young persons who had been properly educated, only one case of criminal con-

duct had occurred ; and the like beneficial effect of instruction was evinced by the evidence of Mr. Robert Owen, superintendant of the cotton mills at New Lanark, in his examination last summer before the committee, for enquiring into the state of education of the lower orders, as well as in his printed work, entitled, *A NEW VIEW OF SOCIETY*. It will not be denied, that in that portion of the community which lives independently of manual labor, the liberal manners, good principles, and decent comportment, which distinguish them from the vulgar, is the fruit of education. It is by these qualities that they are preserved from flagitious as well as from grovelling vices, and from inconsiderately contracting marriages, in circumstances which would entail poverty and distress on their offspring. Will it be said that one portion of the human species is so different from another, that the like ends are not attainable by the like means in the one as in the other ; and that a degree of knowledge suitable to their respective conditions, will not have a like influence on the character and conduct of each ? This is not a speculative conceit, for it has been practically exemplified in Scotland, where by the superior intelligence and virtuous principles, early impressed on the minds of all ranks, the relative duties are inculcated, understood, and practised, the mutual attachments of kindred are cherished, habits of industry and frugality are acquired and exercised, not merely for their own maintenance, but for the support and education of their children, and as a provision against age and sickness, so as to avoid the degradation of parochial relief to themselves, their offspring, their brothers, sisters, or parents. It is well known from authentic historical evidence, that these benefits were derived from the institution of parochial schools, for we learn from the works of Fletcher of Salton, and from some passages in the statistical account of parishes collected by Sir J. Sinclair, that the commonalty of Scotland before that time were extremely brutal, idle, and vicious.

Can it admit of a doubt that instruction being the only means of infusing good principles and self-esteem is the greatest boon that can be conferred on a nation, and the only grounds of hope for recalling the labouring classes of England from that state of degradation into which they have fallen ? Can it be in the order of Providence, that this canker which preys on the moral vitals of the community is irremediable ? The radical remedy however will be sought for in vain, by any other means than that of operating a change in the dispositions and principles of the people, through the medium of instruction. It is manifest that all legal regulation and co-ercion must prove either totally abortive, or merely palliative, without an improvement in those fundamental principles of religion and morality, those sentiments of duty and

self-respect, upon which alone the edifice of human happiness, dignity, and virtue, is reared.¹

ILLUSTRATION III.—Page 278.

The function of money as an instrument for promoting the convenience, and facilitating the transactions of human life is two-fold: it serves as a medium for effecting and expediting the transfer of commodities and the purchase of labor; and it serves as a standard or measure of value, for ascertaining and comparing the value of the subjects of property. The depreciation of it, therefore, must be a matter of serious moment in the affairs of social and civilized life. It is obvious that much inconvenience must arise, when the same denomination of money, a pound for instance, can be exchanged for only half the quantity of the necessities of life, which it could formerly procure under the same circumstances.

The term Depreciation was originally applied to coin whether adulterated by base admixtures, or reduced in weight by monetary fraud, or by wear, at a time when metals were the only circulating medium. When it is applied to paper currency, it means either that reduction of value which takes place in consequence of the suspected solvency of those who issue it, or that which is caused by excess of issues. In the two first senses it affects money, chiefly as a medium of exchange, in the last chiefly as a standard of value. It is in this last sense that we are here to consider it.

The evils resulting from this depreciation are, 1st. The great hardships arising from it to annuitants and others living on fixed incomes. 2dly. The injustice and confusion arising in all contracts for time; for when a depreciation of money takes place in the *interim* between the stipulations of a covenant and its fulfilment, the terms, though the same in name, become totally different in substance and meaning. This holds true, not only in the transactions of private life, but between the public debtor and creditor; for it is obvious that the value of the national stock falls in proportion to this depreciation, and that a portion of the national debt, equal to the difference of the original value and the depreciated value, is virtually paid off to the advantage of the state, and to the prejudice of the stockholder. 3dly. The difficulty of adjusting wages, particularly agricultural wages, to the enhanced price of the necessities of life. The evils which arose from the attempts to correct this by the legislature directing allowance to be made to laborers in health from parochial funds have been already adverted to.

In those ages in which metals were the only medium of ex-

¹ See this subject treated with a comprehension of mind, a force of argument, and a manly elocution, which has rarely been equalled, by Mr. Malthus in the 11th and 12th chap. of the 4th book of his *Essay on the Principle of Population*, 2d Ed.

change, great inconvenience arose from the deterioration of coin both in quality and weight, and we know of no country in which frauds and abuses in this branch of public administration have not been practised to a great extent, as is denoted by the difference of weight of metal equivalent to a pound in money, and that of a pound weight of the same metal, of which the money originally consisted. This is remarkable enough in England, but still more in France. The universal tendency to such depreciation is such, that its opposite, that is, an increase of the value of money is unknown in history as far as I know, and in proof of it there is no word in any language with which I am acquainted, to serve as a co-relative to it. The depreciation and neglect of the coin, as has been already remarked, rose to such a pitch in the reign of Edward VI.¹ that those who brought commodities to market, did not know what to ask for them, and not unfrequently returned home with them and endeavoured to find a market in foreign parts. This, together with the impolitic and impracticable laws enacted in this reign against forestallers, nearly suspended all commerce by precluding the supplies of the market, so that it was found necessary to make a total reformation in the coin in the end of this reign, and that of Queen Elizabeth.

The great multiplication of the precious metals by the discovery of America, caused a great depreciation of coin, but this was not felt in proportion to the magnitude of this increase, for the growth of commerce was so rapid about that time, that a greater quantity was found necessary for carrying on the extended dealings of the world. Metallic money was found soon afterwards to be a very cumbersome and inadequate method, for fulfilling engagements and settling accounts in countries remote from each other. To obviate this, bills of exchange² were brought in aid of money. This was soon improved upon, by the employing of written obligations founded upon credit, as a medium of circulation, so as to make paper perform the function of money; and England being the country in which credit was most vigorous, on account of the superior security of person and property, and superior good faith, grounded on public and individual morality; this species of currency had here the earliest and fullest scope, and has been found of incalculable utility in facilitating commercial transactions, in giving activity to capital, and in stimulating industry. It has the advantage over metallic currency, of not being susceptible of physical deterioration, in being more transportable, of being capable of being increased or diminished, at will, according to the

¹ See treatise on the coins of the Realm, by the Earl of Liverpool, p. 91. London 1805.

² See this subject as well as other branches of political economy, treated with great clearness and precision, in a work intitled "Conversations on Political Economy," a work which from the plain and familiar style in which it is written, is well adapted to diffuse this branch of useful knowledge. London, 1816.

exigences of society, and in its materials costing comparatively nothing. Its disadvantages are, that it may become depreciated by distrust in those on whose credit it is issued, and that it may become totally annihilated by their insolvency. It is liable also to be multiplied to excess, so as to disturb the regularity and fairness of commercial dealings, for if the quantity of any sort of currency is carried beyond a certain point, it loses that useful attribute by which it serves as a standard of value—in other words, it becomes depreciated in virtue of the law of supply and demand by which the exchangeable value of all articles is ascertained; for as commodities and labor are purchased with money, so money may be said to be purchased by these, and the price of money will depend on the quantity at market, like any other article.

It has been alleged in the text, that currency cannot be carried to excess by creating paper money to answer such discounts and loans as the exigencies of manufactures, agriculture, and commerce demand, being the expression and measure, as it were, of what is requisite for these legitimate purposes; and it was farther alleged, that in case either bankers or traders should carry their speculations beyond the bounds of prudence, there was a principle of self-correction which brought them back to what was moderate, and what would prove salutary to themselves and to society. That there has been an excess of circulating medium in the last twenty years is evident, however, from the prices of the necessaries of life, and the wages of labor having nearly doubled in that time. Nor can there be a doubt that this has been mainly owing to the advances made to the State, and the payment of the yearly increasing dividends on the national stocks in their own paper only, and to an unexampled amount, an amount rendered necessary by the peculiar circumstances of the times, the nation having been engaged in a war the most extensive, the most expensive, the most portentous, and the most protracted in the history of the world. This great and rapid creation of circulating medium augmented the price of the precious metals, in common with every other commodity, so that in the year 1797, the Bank found that they could not purchase them for the purpose of coin without ruin to themselves. This gave occasion to the restriction act of that year, prohibiting the Bank of England from paying their notes in cash. This Bank being thus set free from those prudential restraints which co-erce private Banks, it has been alleged that they have abused this licence by making exorbitant issues. This, however, has never been proved, nor does it appear that it could ever be either their wish or their interest to do so. With regard to the discounts made to individuals, it was equally their interest and their duty now, as in time past, to satisfy themselves of the responsibility of those whom they trusted; and with regard to the public accommodation and payments, they have no choice.

They had no other means of paying the interest of the public debt or dividends, as they are called, which from the beginning of the war in 1793, till its conclusion in 1815, had increased from nine millions to twenty-nine¹ millions. The gold had all disappeared by clandestine exportation or hoarding, and if these payments had been made in specie, this would equally have added to the mass of circulating medium. This mass went on increasing in the course of the war by the continued creation of paper currency.

It does not appear to a plain man like the writer of this, what grounds there were in all this for censure, either of the Bank or of the Government. To say that they did not pursue the best possible course, is merely saying that they did not possess that perfection which does not belong to human nature nor human conduct. Great and singular difficulties and dangers called for great and singular exertions, for novel, untried, and unheard-of resources, and we cannot look back with other sentiments than those of gratitude and admiration at the genius, firmness, and perseverance of those statesmen, and on the talents and intrepidity of those warriors by sea and land, who have conducted this arduous and dubious contest to a happy issue. And who will say that the prize has been won at too high a cost, the country having not only saved itself, but delivered the civilised world from the most degrading and almost hopeless subjugation and oppression; and the successful result of the struggle has left it doubtful whether this era in the History of Britain will appear to posterity most wonderful for her unexampled wealth and power, the wisdom and energy of her counsels, the magnitude of her productive industry, and commercial enterprizes, or her martial spirit, the high achievements and renown of her fleets and armies.

During the whole course of this war, there was an accelerated increase, not only of currency which is merely the sign or shadow of wealth, but also of agriculture, of manufacture, of population, of commerce, foreign and domestic, in short, of whatever is understood to constitute the substantial opulence, power, and prosperity of a country. Every one acquainted with history knows that there are particular objects which temporarily excite the human mind in particular ages and countries, and which spread through communities as it were by contagion. The most signal of these objects are the spirit of war and conquest, the pursuits of literature and science, but above all, political and religious phrensies. A more sober and less dangerous species of excitement has possessed the minds of the inhabitants of Great Britain the last twenty years, consisting in a universal spirit or rage for agricultural and manufacturing adventure.

With regard to agriculture, a satisfactory proof of this assertion

¹ This applies only to the unredeemed debt, and is exclusive of the sinking fund which amounted to fourteen millions. See Chalmers's *State of the United Kingdom*, 1816.

will be found in a comparison of the number of inclosure bills at different periods, from the beginning of the last century till the present time. In the reign of King William III. there were none. In the reign of Queen Anne there were three. In the reign of George I. there were sixteen. In that of George II. 144. During that part of the present reign which preceded the late war, that is from 1760 till 1792, the number of these bills was one thousand four hundred and forty, making an annual average of about forty-four. From that time, till 1813, their number was seventeen hundred and ninety-eight, which makes an annual average of about eighty-two. During that part of the present century which had elapsed before this account was taken, that is from 1801 to 1816, both inclusive, the number of these bills was one thousand two hundred and ninety-six, making an annual average of about ninety-nine. In the year 1811, the number was one hundred and thirty-three, which is only eleven less than the whole number in the reign of George II. and the number in any two of these years taken together, is greater than the whole number in the first sixty years of the last century.

This statement presents a true picture of the accelerated rapidity with which this, the most important branch of national industry, has advanced, and affords an authentic specimen of the spirit of the times. The improvement of agriculture in point of skill, added still more perhaps to the sum total of production, than the extension of it implied in the number of inclosure bills, and proves that the intelligence of this age keeps pace with its spirit.

With regard to manufactures and commerce, let us endeavour to find out also some criterion whereby to judge of their progress in the same space of time. Perhaps none better can be pitched upon than the export trade, for the wealth and prosperity of a country must be in proportion to that surplus of its productive industry which remains after the supply of domestic wants. The magnitude of this is ascertainable from the account kept at the Custom-house, both of the tonnage of the ships employed in this trade, and of the value of their cargoes. It appears from this that the average tonnage of ships cleared outward from the ports of Great Britain, including foreign vessels, in the years 1755-6-7 was 572,710, that in the years 1793-4-5, it was 1,518,498, that in the years 1803-4-5, it was 2,059,924, that in 1809, it was 2,280,992, and that in 1814, it was 2,447,268, and from the finance account delivered to the House of Commons, March 1816, it appears that it amounted to 2,777,806 in the year 1815. And it appears that the value of cargoes exported in the same periods was as follows:

¹ See Report of the Committee of the House of Lords, communicated the 23d of Nov. 1814.

² See State of the United Kingdoms at the peace of Paris, by George Chalmers, Esq. London, 1815.

12.371.552*l.* on an average of the years 1755-6-7, 33.614.902*l.* on an average of the years 1793-4-5, 50.301.763*l.* in 1809, 56.591.154*l.* in 1814. It is here observable that the value of cargoes, at the beginning of war, bears a much smaller proportion to that at the end of it, than the amounts of the tonnage at the same period. This is what might be expected, being the necessary result of the depreciation of money in the interim. It follows that the tonnage is the fairest criterion. The export trade therefore, that is, the products of national industry, including that of the colonies in the beginning and at the end of the war, stood in the *ratio* of 1.518.495 to 2.447.268.

It seems natural to think that war should at all times greatly discourage and obstruct commerce. In reviewing historically, however, the comparative commerce of this country at different periods, it does not appear that war has had a very prejudicial effect upon it. In the seven years war the exports were diminished in the first years of it, but this was more than made up by the increase in the latter years of it. In the American war, which partook of the nature of a civil war, it was diminished near a fourth part, compared to the preceding seven years. But it is peculiar to the late war, that the trade should, in the course of it, have increased very near two thirds. This was not owing merely to the annihilation of the fleets of the maritime powers of Europe, all of which were at war with this country, but to the vast increase of production. The enterprising spirit already adverted to, was animated not only by the great quantity of currency set afloat by the issues and accommodations of the Bank of England, but by that of the multiplied country Banks. It appears from the investigations of the bullion committee in 1810, that the number of these Banks in 1797, was 230, and that they had from that time, till 1810, grown to the number of seven hundred and twenty-one.

The first impression made on the mind by reflecting on these statements, is the picture which they exhibit of a great nation, engaged in an extensive war, and pursuing, at the same time, the occupations of peace with singular ardor and success.

The next reflection which naturally occurs is, that as the wants of mankind are limited, this rapid creation of the products of industry must also be limited. From investigations made in the year 1800, it appeared clearly that even in years of plenty, the agriculture of England could not maintain its population. The high prices in that year of scarcity proved an additional stimulus to agriculture, which proceeded as has been already stated with an accelerated pace, so that in the year 1813, the domestic production, together with the importation from the Continent and Ireland, proved more than sufficient for the general subsistence. In the month of February of that year, the average price of wheat was one hundred and nineteen shillings the quarter. After

the gathering in of the crop, which proved a very plentiful one, the price of corn began rapidly to fall, so that the average of December was seventy-two shillings. This fall involves an internal evidence of superabundance; for however the case may be with regard to articles, the demand for which fluctuates with fashion and fancy, it is not conceivable that under the same demand, the price of articles indispensable to life can be affected by any other means than the amount of the supply. Corn continued to fall still lower in 1814, but notwithstanding an enormous importation from France after the conclusion of the treaty of peace, where it could be procured at thirty-three shillings per quarter, none of the monthly averages of that year fell lower than sixty-seven. But the bill brought into parliament for the protection of British agriculture having been thrown out, the importation continued, and the accumulation of foreign grain was so great, that notwithstanding the ports being shut in the month of March 1815, the prices continued falling the whole of that year, so that the average of December, was fifty-five-shillings and ninepence. The lowest price was in the middle of January following, the weekly average having been fifty-two shillings and sixpence. It continued about fifty-five till April, when it began to rise, and continued to do so gradually till harvest, and the new crop proving very deficient in quantity and bad in quality on account of the cold and wet weather of summer, resembling very much the season of 1799, and its being on account of the continued rains badly got in, it rose rapidly, so that in the middle of November the ports were opened in conformity to the act of parliament, the average of the maritime counties having for six weeks been above eighty shillings. The rise since that time has been so rapid that the average of England and Wales was stated in the London Gazette of the 21st of June to be 104.2 that is double of what it was the first month of this year.

From the end of 1813, till the summer 1816, the prices had been so low as in many places not to pay the expences of cultivation, and in none to yield living profit and fair rent. Had the protecting act passed at the beginning of this period, what an infinity of public calamity and individual misery would have been prevented! The evil consequences of the prejudices which prevented this salutary measure, was not confined to farmers and landlords, but recoiled on the authors of it; for the cheapness of bread was much more than countervailed by the want of employment. The great defalcation of the rents of landlords, and of the profits of farmers, disabled them from employing the same number of laborers, and from consuming those articles by which thousands of artisans earn their subsistence. Mr. Western, member of parliament for Essex, in a most able and luminous but affecting speech on this subject,

¹ While the bill was pending in parliament in 1814, the mob of London broke into the house of the Hon. F. Robinson, who brought it in, destroying and defacing the furniture, and committed various outrages in the houses of several other members who were considered as favorable to it.

on the 6th of March 1816, computed that the annual receipts of farmers throughout England and Wales, had suffered a diminution of seventy millions in 1815, compared to 1812, the greater part of which would have been expended in the maintenance of laborers and artisans, and might therefore be regarded as so much withheld from them. The laboring part of the community might therefore be considered as starving in the midst of plenty, as Mr. Western expressed it, being much less able to maintain themselves now than when bread was one third dearer. This blindness was not confined to that class of the community who have ignorance and want of education for their excuse. The measure was opposed by some of those belonging to the superior classes, both in and out of parliament, who pertinaciously resisted, and effectually defeated it in 1813 and 1814, and it passed after considerable opposition in 1815.

These incidents have had the good effect at least of proving the reasonableness and efficacy of protecting the domestic production of corn, which is certainly as well entitled to such protection as certain other branches of manufacture of much less importance. They also illustrate the mutual dependance which all ranks of society have upon each other. What can be more obvious than that the surplus production of the farmer could not be disposable unless there were artisans and manufacturers to consume it, and that the latter could not exist without that large branch of consumption depending on the profits of farmers and the income of landlords.¹

¹ Some eminent political economists regard mere consumers as a burden to the community. The Roman Poet might very justly stigmatise his rich countrymen by the epithet of *fruges consumere nati*, for they supported their luxury by plunder and extortion in subjugated countries, and from the same resources, corrupted the populace by largesses and shows. On the other hand, the luxury, or rather the liberal indulgences, the becoming elegance and splendor of the nobility and gentry of England, is a necessary part of that economical machinery which maintains the circulation and mutual dependance of these two great departments of productive industry, agriculture, and manufactures. It is this state of society, and not the other, which is so aptly characterized in the fable of the belly and the limbs, by which, in the purer ages of the Roman Republic, a dangerous sedition was appeased. If one were called upon to name who was the father and founder of the science of political economy, one would name neither Sir W. Petty, nor M. Quesnoy, nor M. Mirabeau, nor Adam Smith, nor Sir James Stewart, nor any modern author, but Menenius Agrippa, the author of this most ingenious and very apposite apologue, which if it had been equally well understood by the high and low vulgar of this metropolis, as it was by the populace of Rome, we should not have seen the corn bill twice defeated, nor would this city have been disgraced by the scandalous riots of 1814, nor polluted by the still more audacious and seditious outrages of the 2d of Dec. 1816. It has been disputed whether ignorance, faction, or intimidation, had the greatest share in defeating the corn bill. This is a question which the writer of this does not feel himself called upon to decide, nor would it become him to impute motives to any one. But ought not we of this age which calls itself enlightened, and enjoying the boasted benefit of the press in diffusing knowledge; to take some degree of shame to ourselves, that we are less intelligent and more deaf to reason, than the common people of Rome in an early and unlettered age of that state. No science has been more cultivated in the last forty years, than that of political economy, but no subject has been less generally studied and understood, none has produced fewer practical and useful results.

What has been said of agricultural distress applies to the manufacturer's distress. The like sanguine spirit of enterprise brought on the one as it did the other. It appears from preceding statements, that the exports of 1814 and 1815, greatly exceeded those of former years, but the foreign markets were so glutted that great loss was incurred by these adventures. It has already been remarked, how much the distresses of this class were aggravated by the domestic consumption being diminished in consequence of the deficient income from agriculture.

It has not been universally believed nor admitted, that excess of production has been the main cause of the late distresses. Some other causes have been much more insisted on, such as the transition from war to peace, the deficiency of circulating medium, the want of foreign vent for commodities, on account of the Continent having been so recently exhausted and impoverished by war, and from other sources of supply being opened by the peace.

With regard to the first of these, it seems equally irreconcilable to chronology as to truth and reason to maintain it. We have seen that the great fall of the price of corn took place in 1813, before there was either peace or the prospect of it.¹ It is true that the quarter of wheat fell a few shillings lower in 1814, the year of the peace, but this was the necessary consequence of the increased importation. It was plausibly alleged, that the diminution of demand, in consequence of the cessation of the government-contracts, had the principal share in it. But besides this being inadmissible in point of time, it has been shown at page 278 what an insignificant proportion the consumption of soldiers, sailors, and prisoners of war, bears to that of the whole community. But it has been farther alleged, that the agents of government being conspicuous persons in markets, their absence would tend to depress prices, and that markets, when fully supplied, fall greatly upon very small additions, just as when the scales of a balance are nicely poised, a single grain sinks one of them deeply. All this is admitted, yet it is quite plain, that whatever secondary causes there may have been, the main cause, whatever it was, must have been in full operation before the peace or the prospects of it, and that this cause could be no other than a redundant supply.

Nor is it historically true, that similar distress has usually occurred on the event of a peace. I can find no traces of any such thing after the treaties of Utrecht nor Aix la Chapelle, nor after the seven years war. On the latter event in 1763, this was so far from being the case, that the London merchants were in the highest state of prosperity, and stepped forwards to prop the tottering

¹ There were certainly very sanguine hopes entertained by many of the fall of Buonaparte, after the battle of Leipsic on the 18th of October of this year, but the contest continued dubious till the capture of Paris in the beginning of April 1814.

credit of some of the foreign Banks.¹ After the close of the American war, there was very considerable distress in consequence of a very bad crop in 1782, by which, some of the districts of the northern parts of the island were brought to the brink of famine, and a few persons were said to have died of want. Whatever partial distresses there might be at these periods from the state of commerce, they were confined to merchants, bankers, and stock-jobbers, and did not in the least partake of the nature of the calamity, which since 1813 has pervaded the body of the population. The most serious mercantile distresses in the last fifty years, have occurred in time of profound peace, that is in the years 1771 and 1792, originating in an excess of speculation.²

And with regard to the deficiency of circulating medium, this will certainly not apply to the country at large in a year in which there are proofs of more floating and disposable, as well as circulating money, than ever was before known in this, or probably any other country; for the sum total of the taxes in 1813 amounted to 62 millions, and the sum of two loans contracted for in the same year was 43 millions, which was obtained at a very moderate interest. But it may be alleged that, however this might be, the farmers found actually greater want of money than in former years, and were compelled to bring their grain to premature markets, and to dispose of it at inadequate prices. These facts are incontrovertible, but they were the effect and not the cause of the distress; for in consequence of the sudden and unexpected fall of the price of agricultural produce, the farmers could not make the usual deposits with the provincial bankers, who were thereby in their turn incapable of furnishing the usual accommodations to the farmers.³

The remedies which have been proposed for these evils may be classed under the three heads—of the benevolent, the spontaneous, and the legislative.

1. The relief best adapted to an evil in its nature temporary seems to be that of individual benevolence. However much the labouring class may be blameable for their improvidence, it be-

¹ See Chalmers's Estimate.

² It is remarkable that these three great epochs of commercial distress, namely, 1771, 1792, and 1813, have fallen out at exactly the same interval of time from each other, that is twenty-one years. Is this merely casual, or is there a sort of cycle in human affairs like certain periodical revolutions in nature?

³ The reader may possibly expect that the author should not here pass entirely unnoticed certain political causes to which the distresses of the country have been imputed; but as he knows of no process of reasoning which can induce a conviction, or even a suspicion in any rational mind, that parliamentary reform, or sinecure places have any connexion with the present question; it is impossible to combat such gratuitous assumptions by serious argument, and he can only deplore in common with every one who values the public peace, or feels for the honor of the age and country in which he lives, that such assertions should have been employed to excite the late tumultuary and seditious outrages, and still more, that such sentiments should have been entertained and acted upon by certain corporate bodies. See the Address of the City of London, December 9, 1816.

comes the opulent, in such moments of distress, to come forward with voluntary and gratuitous relief, a species of relief recommended by its being an exercise of the best affections of the heart, and by its superseding such legislative relief as might lead to permanent evil and inconvenience, as has been strongly adverted to in the text, in the scarcity of 1800. The generosity of landlords in remitting rent has been very efficient in relieving the farmers, and the ample pecuniary subscriptions now on foot will go far towards the relief of the other classes. A fine example of the wisdom and efficacy, as well as of the practical philanthropy of this species of bounty came last summer before the Committee of Education in the examination of Mr. Robert Owen, superintendant of the Cotton Works near Lanark, on the river Clyde. When the rupture with America occurred in 1812, there was a suspension of these works, in consequence of the cessation of the demand. The operative people, of whom a great proportion was very young persons, were retained and supported at the expense of the owners till the return of employment. The expense incurred by this was £7000, and the owners declared that they never expended the like sum more to their advantage and satisfaction.

2. There is in the body politic, as in the natural, a certain *self-healing* principle, by which its disorders are removed by spontaneous processes. If the author is right in assigning an exuberant supply as the main cause of distress, the evil necessarily leads to cure itself by continued consumption, and has already, in a great measure, done so. That principle also, by which every derangement of supply and demand tends to correct itself through the operation of the natural propensities and fair self-interest of mankind, has already been fully adverted to. It will now be said, perhaps, by the adversaries of the corn-bill, that the country is fortunate in possessing a store of foreign corn to meet the present exigency of a short crop. But on the other hand, may it not with more reason be alleged, that the native cultivation has been discouraged and abridged, not less by the inundation of foreign corn thrown into the market than what was allowed to be warehoused duty free, thereby damping the prospects of the English farmer. Had not this been the case, the domestic production would have compensated the bad harvest. At the period of ploughing and sowing the bad season could not be foreseen.

3. Of the legislative means of relief, the act for prohibiting importation, till wheat should be 80 shillings the quarter, was the measure most calculated to mitigate the general calamity. Much censure was cast on the Government by those who conceived the distresses to arise from a scarcity of circulating medium, for not stepping forward with pecuniary relief to the farmer. This is certainly not without precedent; for in the year 1792 the Grenada merchants were accommodated with five millions in Exchequer

Bills; an operation which succeeded perfectly by relieving these merchants, and proving no loss to Government. But the magnitude and universality of the present distresses are plainly such as to render this sort of relief hopeless and impracticable. The only other substantial relief afforded by the legislature, besides the corn act above-mentioned, was a repeal of the war duties on malt, as proposed by Mr. Western, who proved that these duties had been raised so high as to diminish the cultivation of barley. There was also a protecting duty imposed on foreign butter and cheese. The other means of relief proposed by him were chiefly, the repealing the act for warehousing foreign corn, a bounty on exportation, a high duty on certain articles, such as rape, seed, and tallow imported, as they depreciated the same articles of domestic production. And he alleged, that as the tithes and poor's rates were paid almost exclusively by those engaged in agriculture, the land ought to be relieved as much as possible from other burdens.

It has been found that the power of the legislature in such a matter is extremely limited, and it will be seen from the next illustration that it is as apt to do too much as too little, by its interference.

ILLUSTRATION IV.

After the publication of this letter in 1800, the principal measures which were taken by Parliament, with a view to the farther alleviation of the public distress, were

1. On the 15th of December an additional bounty was granted on the importation of corn and flour, ensuring the importer against a fall of the market, by making up to him as much as the market price should fall below 100 shillings, and as much as the sack of flour should fall below 70 shillings.

2. An act passed for the suspension of the distilleries, and of the manufactory of starch, from the 8th of December, 1800, to the 1st of January, 1802.

3. A bounty was granted on the importation of rice and Swedish herrings.

4. A law passed on the 31st of December, 1800, restricting the miller from grinding any flour except what is used in making the wheaten standard bread, that is, the whole grain except the bran and pollard, and prohibiting the baker from baking any bread of pure fine flour, from the above date till November, 1801.

All these measures proved salutary, except the last, which was found so impracticable and detrimental, that it was suspended on the 9th of February following for six weeks, and at the end of that time it was repealed. This, like the importation by Government in 1795, and the Bread Company of 1800, both of which proved either detrimental or nugatory, affords a proof of that coincidence of public and private interest, to illustrate which has been one of the principal objects of the preceding letter. The reasons

alleged for this bill were, that in preparing white flour, a great proportion of the wholesome part of the grain is excluded, which might be turned to human subsistence. The advocates of this measure seem to have forgot that though these portions of the grain are rejected in the manufacture of bread, they are by no means lost to human subsistence, inasmuch as they serve for the feeding of poultry and hogs, which would perish without this resource. It is clearly the interest of the miller and baker, as it is of every other manufacturer, so to prepare and apportion the different forms of his commodity, as to meet the several wants of the different classes of the community, and in so doing, he best consults their advantage by avoiding misapplication and waste.

Among the new legislative enactments made in consequence of these two successive years of scarcity, that for the enumeration of the people should not be forgot. In the course of the discussions on this subject, frequent references were made to the amount of the population, with a view to ascertain the measure of consumption, and to adapt the resources to it. But as there were no means of ascertaining this but by inference and conjecture founded on very vague *data*, a bill was brought in and passed, for making an enumeration of the people in Great Britain, which was carried into effect, and the result reported next year, 1801, and has been again acted upon in 1811 : affording valuable documents to the statesman, and interesting materials for the cultivation of natural, as well as political and moral science. The quotations made in the course of this discussion may serve as an example of this.

The purpose however of greatest utility to which such reports could be turned, would be that of computing the value of lives, with a view to the equitable calculation of reversionary payments and life insurances. They could not answer this end however without an addition to the present heads of information. This addition would consist in a division of both sexes into classes according to their ages, specifying the number under 3 years from 3 to 10, from 10 to 20, and so on as far as 90. The calculations could then be adjusted to the respective rates of mortality in town and country, and in different districts of the country. As this would be of incredible utility in a country such as this, where institutions of this kind are so numerous and still increasing, it is to be hoped it will be adopted in the next enumeration. That it is quite practicable is demonstrated by its having long made part of the Swedish tables of population. These remarks were suggested in a conversation with Mr. Morgan, actuary of the Equitable Insurance Office, who has perhaps applied his mind with as much assiduity and success to such subjects as any one ever did.

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